EQUIPPING A NEW GENERATION: AN INTEGRATED PATHWAY FOR YOUNG ADULT DISCIPLESHIP AND SPIRITUAL FORMATION

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CONTENTS

ABSTRACT v

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS vi

DEDICATION ix

EPIGRAPH xi

INTRODUCTION 1

CHAPTER

1. MINISTRY FOCUS 6
2. BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS 24
3. HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS 43
4. THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS 63
5. INTERDISCIPLINARY FOUNDATIONS 88
6. PROJECT ANALYSIS 111
    - Introduction 111
    - Methodology 114
    - Implementation 122
    - Summary of Learnings 128
    - Conclusion 138

APPENDIX

A. MINISTRY MODEL CREATION 144

B. CHARTS AND GRAPHS OF NARRATIVE RESPONSES.....151

BIBLIOGRAPHY.....155

ABSTRACT

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Greenleaf Christian Church (GCC) is a mid-sized church in Goldsboro, North Carolina. The discipleship and spiritual formation programming for young adult members at GCC was disrupted for several years. If church leaders participate in a six-week focus training about discipleship and spiritual formation, then they will be equipped to restart and reinstitute the young adult discipleship ministry. The research method will be qualitative in nature. The purpose of this training is to equip leaders to implement a sustainable ministry program that will develop young adults on their inward Christian journey while understanding their external purpose in the world.

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I offer my deepest gratitude to those whose guidance, wisdom, and unwavering support made this doctoral journey possible. I am especially honored to acknowledge my three mentors—Dr. Philip L. Pointer, Dr. Danielle L. Brown, and Dr. Charles E. Goodman, Jr. Each of you modeled excellence in ministry, integrity in leadership, and faithfulness to God's call. Your example has shaped my preaching, my thinking, and my commitment to the work of the Church.

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final year and became the support I never knew I needed. While I committed to encouraging him, he upheld me through school, ministry, and my mother's passing. His presence has been a profound gift.

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To my young adult PBC gang—you know who you are and what you mean to me. Thank you for the laughter, love, and steadfast support. To my Hampton University family, especially those connected through the Hampton Choirs, I pray that my life

continues to “do the singing.” To my line sisters: you push me to reach for the moon and land among the stars. Your sisterhood inspires me to strive for excellence in all things.

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Finally, to my family: I pray that my academic journey unlocks the door for others to pursue terminal degrees and greater academic success. Your love has been my foundation, your sacrifices my motivation, and your pride my encouragement. Everything I have achieved rests on the shoulders of those who came before me and supports those who will come after. To all who walked with me, encouraged me, challenged me, and held me up—I thank God for you. This work is as much yours as it is mine.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the strong women in my family, on whose shoulders I proudly stand. Their strength, resilience, and quiet wisdom live deep in my bones, shaping who I am and how I serve. Though no longer physically present, their spirits remain with me—guiding, grounding, and holding me with grace.

Grandma Lucille Frazier, Granny Augusta Smith, Great Aunt Elaine Hogan, Aunt Elfreida Hardie, Cousin Robin Montoute, and Bonus Grandma/Big Ma Beatrice Knight—your lives embodied grit, beauty, and gentleness. I am because you were. I also dedicate this project to my mother, who transitioned from this life on November 13, 2025, just before I completed my final document. My heart remains broken that you will not be here to witness my graduation, yet your presence surrounds every page of this work. It has been an honor to develop a project rooted in your favorite scripture, Proverbs 22:6. You did not merely recite this verse—you lived it. You raised Shawn and me with conviction, nurtured young people in ministry, and shaped countless children in our home through Christian Choice Family Day Care. Mom, I pray your baby girl made you proud.

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overlooked it. And you brag about me in ways that keep me humble, because I often look around wondering who you could possibly be talking about—surely it cannot be me!

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To my cousin-sisters—Debbie, Khaleelah, Shea, Brittany, and Baiylee—thank you for being my first friends, my confidantes, and my lifelong sisters. Your presence has been a constant source of strength. To my goddaughter, ZaLeigh—Godmommy sees greatness in you. I push hard so you will always know that excellence is our standard and that nothing God has for you is beyond your reach.

Finally, this dedication extends to every woman who has ever endured emotional abuse in marriage, ministry, or family. I stand as living proof that we can leave and/or transform those relationships, speak up for ourselves with courage, and move forward with our heads held high as we pursue everything God has destined for us. We are not damaged. We were becoming diamonds under pressure. May we continue to sparkle—brilliantly and unapologetically—from the inside out.

Theology must be accountable to the lived experiences of people, especially those who struggle to find their voices in the church.

— Jacquelyn Grant, *White Women's Christ and Black Women's Jesus: Feminist Christology and Womanist Response*

INTRODUCTION

The Christian Church in the twenty-first century has navigated complex cultural, spiritual, and generational transitions. Among these shifts, one of the most pressing challenges has been the disengagement of young adults from intentional discipleship and structured spiritual formation. Greenleaf Christian Church, Disciples of Christ, located in Goldsboro, North Carolina, experienced this challenge firsthand. While the congregation has maintained a long history of prophetic witness, social advocacy, and community transformation, a discernible gap has emerged in its ability to engage young adults in sustained discipleship practices. This gap not only affected the congregation's present vitality but also had long-term implications for cultivating a thriving, multigenerational faith community.

This Doctor of Ministry project, “Equipping a New Generation: An Integrated Pathway for Young Adult Discipleship and Spiritual Formation,” was developed in response to that recognized need. The project was grounded in a ministerial commitment to empowering leaders, nurturing spiritual growth, and creating contexts in which emerging generations could grow in faith, develop a missional identity, and contribute meaningfully to the life of the church. The purpose of the project was to address the discipleship gap by implementing a seven-session training program designed to equip church leaders with theological, historical, relational, and practical tools necessary to engage young adults intentionally and effectively. This introduction clarifies the context,

purpose, theological rationale, and significance of this work within the broader mission of Greenleaf Christian Church.

Problem and Need

In recent years, Greenleaf Christian Church experienced considerable disruption in programming related to the spiritual formation of young adults. Although the congregation remained a strong community presence with active ministries in social justice and spiritual care, its young adult population lacked consistent discipleship pathways. This concern reflected a broader national trend in which emerging adults sought authenticity, relational connection, and meaningful spiritual guidance, yet disengaged from programs perceived as disconnected from their lived experience.

The researcher's ministerial journey, Chapter One, was deeply intertwined with the motivation for this project. Having served in preaching, teaching, and leadership capacities, I witnessed the transformative power of intentional discipleship. This calling consistently centered on equipping others, fostering spiritual growth, and strengthening the body of Christ through relational ministry. These experiences shaped the understanding of the church's responsibility to nurture disciples across generations and to create environments where faith could be cultivated with care, purpose, and intentionality.

The researcher's personal theological formation emphasized the importance of community, mentorship, and spiritual guidance—principles that aligned directly with the needs of Greenleaf Christian Church's young adult population. The synergy between personal calling, ministerial skills, and the congregation's emerging needs formed the

foundation of this project. This alignment reinforced the conviction that the project could contribute to renewed discipleship practices within the church and inspire long-term strategies for engaging future generations.

Chapter Two, the biblical foundation for this project centered on Proverbs 22:6, which exhorts the faith community to "train children in the right way, and when they are old, they will not stray." While often interpreted in the context of childhood development, the verse reveals a broader theological principle: discipleship requires intentional, relational, and sustained guidance across the lifespan. The Hebrew term ḥănōḵ connotes a process shaped by mentorship, encouragement, and communal responsibility.

This biblical vision underscored that discipleship was not merely a transfer of information but a relational and experiential journey. Young adults require spiritual companions who walk alongside them, encourage them, and help them discern their identity and purpose in Christ. Proverbs 22:6 therefore supported a ministry framework rooted in mentorship, relational accountability, and community-based formation. This foundation aligned with the church's mission and provided theological grounding for developing a revitalized discipleship strategy.

Chapter Three, the historical foundation of the project, drew inspiration from the ministry of Catherine Ferguson, an African American woman whose pioneering efforts to establish Sunday school in the early nineteenth century reshaped Christian education within her community. Ferguson's example demonstrated the power of relational investment, community-based instruction, and intentional discipleship even under challenging societal conditions. Her work affirmed that transformational spiritual formation often begins with ordinary believers' commitment to nurture others.

Chapter Four was informed by Missional Theology, which emphasized the Church's calling to participate in God's redemptive work in the world. Missional Theology asserts that discipleship cannot be contained solely within internal programming but must shape how individuals live, serve, and witness daily. By grounding the training program in missional identity, the project invited leaders to cultivate Christlike compassion, justice, and engagement as essential components of young adult formation.

Chapter Five, interdisciplinary insights, particularly from transformational leadership theory, further informed this project. Transformational leadership emphasizes relational engagement, empowerment, vision casting, and the development of individuals and communities. These leadership principles aligned closely with the project's goals, which sought to strengthen leaders' capacity to guide young adults with empathy, clarity, and purpose. Leaders who cultivated trust, communication, and shared vision were better equipped to create environments where discipleship could flourish. The integration of biblical, historical, theological, and leadership perspectives provided a holistic foundation for designing and implementing the project.

Chapter Six reflected the purpose of this Doctor of Ministry project was to equip church leaders at Greenleaf Christian Church with the knowledge, skills, and relational tools necessary to engage young adults in intentional discipleship and spiritual formation. This purpose was accomplished through a seven-session training program that integrated biblical teaching, historical insight, Missional Theology, and transformational leadership principles. The training program sought to:

1. Strengthen leaders' theological understanding of discipleship.
2. Develop practical strategies for relational and missional ministry.
3. Increase leaders' confidence and capacity to mentor young adults.
4. Support the creation of sustainable structures for young adult spiritual formation.

The seven-session training program included theological reflection, leadership development, relational ministry strategies, and collaborative design of discipleship pathways. Participants engaged in discussions, case studies, spiritual practices, and planning exercises intended to prepare them to guide young adults in their spiritual journeys. The project concluded with an evaluative analysis of participants' experiences and the implications for future ministry at Greenleaf Christian Church.

This project was significant for several reasons. First, it addressed a critical gap in the church's discipleship ministry by offering a structured, contextually relevant approach to young adult spiritual formation. Second, it empowered leaders with tools that fostered their own spiritual growth and enhanced their effectiveness in mentoring others. Third, it supported the broader mission of the church by strengthening its capacity to raise up a new generation of believers who were spiritually grounded, missionally engaged, and prepared to contribute to the transformation of their community and world.

Ultimately, the project affirmed God's calling upon the church to "equip the saints for the work of ministry" and to cultivate disciples who embodied faith, purpose, and resilience. By investing in young adults, Greenleaf Christian Church demonstrated its commitment to sustaining a vibrant and multigenerational Christian community prepared for the challenges and possibilities of the future.

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

Introduction

To understand God is to understand the kingdom that lies within each of us. While we could never wrap an understanding of God in man's words, we could draw a meaning out of who we are. We can find the keys to the kingdom as we interpret the groaning of our hearts. My connection with God brings me to the all-consuming enlightenment of these keys. The keys to the kingdom are to live justly, love freely, and hate oppression and all its mechanisms. As I understand these keys, I am compelled to reflect on the words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. "I have the audacity to believe that people everywhere can have three meals a day for their bodies, education, and culture for their minds, and dignity, equality, and freedom for their spirits."[1] This heartfelt statement encompasses the keys to the kingdom, and Dr. King's sentiments have been felt around the world. My beliefs and doctrines have pushed me to become a visionary for change, especially in the development of leadership pipelines as well as program development for young adults that seeks to sustain their active involvement in the church and the surrounding community.

[1] Martin Luther King, Jr., "Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech," Nobel Prize Organization, https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/1964/king/acceptance-speech/.

Context

Demographic Analysis of Goldsboro, North Carolina

Goldsboro, North Carolina, situated in the eastern part of the state, is the county seat of Wayne County. Over the years, Goldsboro has transformed into a diverse and growing city with a rich history shaped by its agricultural roots and strategic location. This demographic analysis offers an overview of the city's population, ethnic composition, economic profile, and the trends influencing its development.

Population and Growth Trends

As of the 2020 United States Census, Goldsboro had a population of 59,839, representing an increase from 57,342 in the 2010 Census. While the city's population has seen some growth, it remains relatively stable compared to other urban areas in North Carolina. The city's growth rate has been modest, reflecting both the regional economy and broader demographic trends, such as migration patterns and local economic conditions Goldsboro's population density stands at approximately 1,800 people per square mile. The city covers an area of about 31.7 square miles, contributing to a moderate level of urbanization, with suburban and rural areas surrounding the city (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020).[2]

[2] U.S. Census Bureau, "2020 Census Data," U.S. Census Bureau, https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2020/dec/2020-census-data.html.

Ethnic Composition

Like much of eastern North Carolina, Goldsboro has a diverse population, with African Americans forming the largest racial group. According to the 2020 Census data, 49.5% of the population is African American or Black. This is followed by a 40.6% White population, with smaller percentages of Hispanic or Latino individuals (7.9%) and Asian Americans (1.2%).[3]

The city's demographic composition reflects the broader racial and ethnic makeup of Wayne County, where African Americans have historically made up a significant portion of the population. In recent years, the Hispanic population has grown as part of broader national trends, contributing to the area's increasing cultural diversity.

Age and Household Structure

Goldsboro has a median age of 38.4 years, which is slightly younger than the statewide median of 39.5 years. This indicates a relatively youthful population, although the city also has a notable percentage of older adults. About 18.2% of Goldsboro's population is 65 years or older, aligning with broader aging trends seen in rural areas of North Carolina.[4] Regarding household composition, 41.4% of households in Goldsboro are family households, with 55.1% of these families being married couples. The city also

[3] U.S. Census Bureau, "2020 Census Data," U.S. Census Bureau, https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2020/dec/2020-census-data.html.

[4] U.S. Census Bureau, "2020 Census Data," U.S. Census Bureau, https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2020/dec/2020-census-data.html.

has a notable percentage of households led by single mothers, especially among African American households.[5]

Education and Employment

Goldsboro is home to several educational institutions, including Wayne Community College and Goldsboro High School. The city's education level is slightly below the national average: 79.7% of adults aged twenty-five and older have a high school diploma or equivalent, and 18.4% hold a bachelor's degree or higher.[6] Economically, Goldsboro has a diverse employment base, though it continues to rely heavily on manufacturing, retail, and government services. The presence of Seymour Johnson Air Force Base, located just outside the city, has a significant impact on the local economy, providing jobs in the military and supporting industries. The unemployment rate in Goldsboro stands at approximately 5.3%, which is above the national average but similar to other rural and semi-rural communities in North Carolina.[7]

Economic Overview

Goldsboro's economy has historically relied on agriculture, especially tobacco farming, although this industry has declined in recent decades. Today, the city has diversified into sectors such as manufacturing, retail, and government services. Major

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[5] U.S. Census Bureau, "2020 Census Data," U.S. Census Bureau, https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2020/dec/2020-census-data.html.

[6] U.S. Census Bureau, "2020 Census Data," U.S. Census Bureau, https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2020/dec/2020-census-data.html.

[7] U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Goldsboro, NC - Unemployment Rate," U.S. Bureau of Labor, https://www.bls.gov/lau/tables/#unemployment-rate.

employers in the area include the military, particularly Seymour Johnson Air Force Base, as well as industrial companies like Wayne Memorial Hospital and Mount Olive Pickle Company, and various retail chains.[8] The median household income in Goldsboro is $43,473, which is lower than the statewide median of $57,341. Poverty rates in Goldsboro are relatively high, with 23.4% of the population living below the poverty line, reflecting ongoing economic challenges.[9]

Housing and Infrastructure

Goldsboro's housing market has experienced moderate growth over the years. The median home value stands at $135,000, which is below the state average, signaling a more affordable housing market compared to other areas of North Carolina. The city features a combination of single-family homes, multi-family units, and apartment complexes. Goldsboro also boasts a relatively high rate of homeownership, with 56.3% of housing units being owner-occupied.[10]

The city's infrastructure, including roads and public services, is relatively well-developed for its size, although it faces challenges common to smaller cities, such as limited public transportation options and occasional economic stagnation in certain areas. Goldsboro, North Carolina, is a city with a unique demographic profile shaped by its history, location, and economic evolution. The city has a diverse population, with a

[8] U.S. Census Bureau, "2020 Census Data," U.S. Census Bureau, https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2020/dec/2020-census-data.html.

[9] U.S. Census Bureau, "2020 Census Data," U.S. Census Bureau, https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2020/dec/2020-census-data.html.

[10] U.S. Census Bureau, "2020 Census Data," U.S. Census Bureau, https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2020/dec/2020-census-data.html.

significant African American community, and is experiencing modest growth. While economic challenges remain, particularly in terms of poverty and educational attainment, the city's strategic location near Seymour Johnson Air Force Base provides a foundation for future development. Efforts to diversify the economy, improve education, and expand infrastructure will be crucial in shaping the future of Goldsboro.[11]

Greenleaf Christian Church in the Goldsboro Context

Goldsboro, the county seat of Wayne County, North Carolina, is a city with a rich history, including a strong African American presence. Founded in the mid-nineteenth century, Goldsboro has long been a cultural and commercial hub in eastern North Carolina. The city has witnessed the development of many African American churches that have played central roles in spiritual and civic life.

Goldsboro's racial makeup has long been diverse, with African Americans constituting a significant part of the population. During the Civil Rights Movement, Goldsboro served as a site for both struggle and progress, with local African American churches, including those of the Disciples of Christ tradition, emerging as hubs for activism and community organization.[12]

Greenleaf Christian Church, founded in 1886, continues this tradition by engaging in social justice initiatives and providing a space for community involvement. As a predominantly African American congregation, the church acts not only as a place of

[11] U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Goldsboro, NC - Unemployment Rate," U.S. Bureau of Labor, https://www.bls.gov/lau/tables/#unemployment-rate.

[12] D. B. Barrett, "The African American Church and Its Role in Social Change: A Goldsboro Perspective," *Journal of Southern Religious History* 23, no. 2 (2018): 45-60.

worship but also as a venue for fellowship, advocacy, and leadership development. Its participation in local issues such as education, economic development, and racial equality is in line with the broader mission of the Disciples of Christ tradition, which seeks to promote unity and justice.

Greenleaf's Role in the Community

Greenleaf Christian Church serves a multifaceted role in the Goldsboro community. Its activities go beyond traditional worship services and include outreach programs focused on meeting the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of its congregation and the surrounding neighborhood. These programs encompass food pantries, youth mentoring, educational support, and health initiatives. Additionally, Greenleaf engages with the broader ecumenical community through participation in interfaith dialogue and regional social justice efforts.[13]

The church's dedication to social justice directly reflects the Disciples of Christ tradition's focus on equality, service, and advocacy. Greenleaf has shown leadership in tackling local issues like poverty, racial inequality, and access to education. Specifically, the church has played a significant role in advocating for the interests of the African American community in the face of economic and social challenges.

The Sociopolitical Landscape of Goldsboro

Goldsboro's historical and current socio-political landscape has shaped and influenced Greenleaf Christian Church's engagement with its members and the wider

[13] Greenleaf Christian Church, "About Us," Greenleaf Christian Church Website, https://www.greenleafchristianchurch.org.

community. Like many Southern towns, Goldsboro has faced racial segregation, economic disparities, and political challenges. Nevertheless, over time, the city has seen notable improvements, particularly regarding racial integration and economic development.[14]

The church, as part of the broader African American church community, has served as a vital vehicle for political and social empowerment. The importance of African American churches in the South as centers for resistance, identity formation, and community-building cannot be overstated. Greenleaf Christian Church's participation in Goldsboro's development—especially through its outreach programs, youth leadership training, and civic engagement—has contributed to addressing some of the city's pressing issues, from unemployment to racial reconciliation.[15]

Ministry Journey

I am a proud alumnus of Hampton University in Hampton, Virginia, where I graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Music with a concentration in Education. I love that God has blessed me with a gift for music, and I have freely used that gift in ministry. I began serving in a leadership role in music ministry at the age of sixteen as an Assistant Choir Director at Paradise Baptist Church in Newark, while also serving as Student Director of the Gospel Choir at my alma mater, Immaculate Conception High School in Montclair, New Jersey.

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[14] C. Cohen, *Goldsboro: A History of Racial Integration and Community Empowerment* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 24.

[15] J. Smith, *The Disciples of Christ: A Legacy of Unity and Service* (St. Louis, MO: Christian Publishing Press, 2003), 54.

I traveled the country with HU's Concert Choir and the Gospel Choir "His Chosen Sounds," as one of their booming contraltos (Alto II), which is a rare voice part with a low and wide range. I starred as "Evillene" in the Hampton Players' performance of "The Wiz." Shortly after college, I ventured into playwriting, directing and producing my original work entitled "Christmas on 15th Ave," performed by a phenomenal cast and crew at my former church. I have also sung and recorded with Linell Andrews and One Voice, as well as Linden Jones and Nu Sound. I have served as a state delegate for GMWA, where I sang on stage with several mainstream gospel recording artists.

I have served in various capacities in ministry. I was the Lead Choir Director of PBC, where I led and trained two choir directors under my tutelage. I also directed the Women's Summer Fellowship Choir, which later led to my role as Worship Director for the International Conference WODD, Inc., which involved performances as far away as Nassau, Bahamas. I was the church's Worship Leader, served as Choir Director for the Episcopal District, and was one of the state Choir Directors for Full Gospel Baptist Church Fellowship International. I represented New Jersey as a delegate for the Worship Team at the International Conference and sang in the Choir alongside three mainstream recording artists within the fellowship. As I felt God calling me to take on more responsibilities, I began my journey at New York Theological Seminary in September 2011 and completed my M.Div. on May 17, 2014 (which is also my birthday). I finished my Credo entitled "Keys to the Kingdom," in which I addressed the theme of liberation, emphasizing the importance of living justly, loving freely, opposing oppression and its mechanisms, and most importantly, remaining humble. I realize that this graduation symbolized the birth of something greater!

Professionally, I have over twenty years of experience working with children. One of my most esteemed roles was as a Middle School Music Teacher at Marion P. Thomas Charter School, where I served as the PAWS Director (Performing Arts with Style) and as the Lead Producer for the Foundation's Annual Performance and Awards Gala, "Fathers For Our Children," featuring performances at the Newark Museum and NJPAC. I also launched the Showcases of Excellence and am well regarded for revitalizing the Magnificent Marching Tigers, the MPTCS Middle School Marching Band. I have worked in both Newark Charter and Public Schools. I have secured grants for the schools, including funding from Music and The Brain of NYC, which allowed us to receive a full classroom of keyboards, enabling me to teach Beginner Keyboard to eager students. Additionally, I secured a grant from M&T Bank and NJPAC to provide recorders to all third-grade students, who debuted at the Winter Concert. I currently serve as the Vocal Music/Choir Teacher at University High School of Newark and have been chosen to lead our voices for the Neighborhood Tree Lighting, perform at City Hall, conduct at the school district's annual Vocal Jubilee for three consecutive years, and recently received a request to bring my choir to perform at an event honoring the Superintendent of Schools. I view all this work as an opportunity for God to guide me and further my calling to nurture a nation through education and ministry.

I have served in the field of Christian Education as a Bible Study Teacher, a New Members Class Instructor, and recently, I have been entrusted with the responsibility of equipping leaders. I am excited about what God is doing, and I believe in the word that came from the prophet Isaiah in Isaiah 43:19: "See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in

the wasteland." Understanding what God is doing, I'm also holding on to the scripture Nehemiah 2:18: "I also told them about the gracious hand of my God on me and what the king had said to me. They replied, 'Let us start rebuilding.' So, they began this good work."

Connections

My connections throughout my life's journey, as I perceive them in my context, include family, mentorship, church, and community. I come from a strong and blended biological family. I see how my core unit has influenced my direction in life. I am intentional about building relationships and acknowledge the values passed down to me by my family. I descend from Sunday school teachers and spiritual leaders. There has always been a strong sense of responsibility towards the church and its mission. We have even grown together throughout our ministry journey. Beyond the ministry context, my parents raised three college graduates and three children focused on advancing their lives while serving in ministry. This focus was not always evident among other family members, yet my parents and siblings remain humble, and we consistently strive to love and lead them with humility. We are often seen as an example to our biological family, which also impacts our spiritual family.

Due to our parents' example, we were always encouraged to remain connected to our biological family and build strong relationships with our spiritual family. We were also raised to care for and love our church family and see past any flaws. We were raised in an atmosphere of discipleship, grounded in humble beginnings, Sunday school, personal growth, and the practical application of the scriptures.

I easily transitioned into mentorship, especially after becoming a schoolteacher with this perspective. It led young people to connect with me beyond the classroom and the subjects I taught. I began to have mentees at both work and church, which encouraged me to adopt a nurturing role. This shift changed how I presented myself and kept me focused, knowing that some young person was always observing my way of life and my reactions to daily challenges. I felt a strong sense of responsibility to support their growth and progress.

As I engaged with individuals' lives while furthering my education and career, I looked beyond the circumstances of my workplace and ministry to examine the community around my place of service. The nursing homes in the area require our support. The housing market needs our input and advocacy. People need a safe haven with adequate resources. I am committed not only to providing for others but also to empowering them to obtain resources for themselves and transform their mindset. Communities flourish when the minds are shifted through increased awareness. My project will focus on an area capable of transforming relationships and mindsets, ultimately benefiting the community.

Developing the Synergy

Greenleaf Christian Church, Disciples of Christ, has faced considerable disruption in its discipleship and spiritual formation programs for young adults. This has created a gap in the spiritual development and community engagement of this group. My personal ministerial development, characterized by a dedication to fostering spiritual growth and equipping leaders, aligns closely with the needs of this context. Over the years, I have

developed skills in preaching, teaching, and program development, all focused on nurturing faith and empowering others to lead.

My spiritual journey—anchored in a passion for transformative ministry and a theological foundation that emphasizes discipleship—positions me to bridge this gap. I have witnessed firsthand the impact of intentional, structured discipleship programs in revitalizing communities and nurturing spiritual growth. This alignment of my context and ministerial skills serves as the foundation for my Doctor of Ministry project.

Proposed Project Description

The primary goal of my doctoral project is to design and implement a focused seven-session training program for church leaders at Greenleaf Christian Church. This program will focus on discipleship and spiritual formation, equipping leaders with the theological understanding, practical tools, and confidence necessary to relaunch the church's young adult discipleship ministry. The training will include:

- Theological Foundations: Exploring biblical principles of discipleship, with Proverbs 22:6 as a guiding scripture.
- Spiritual Practices: Introducing and practicing disciplines such as prayer, meditation, and scripture study.
- Leadership Development: Equipping leaders with strategies for mentoring young adults and fostering a supportive faith community.
- Program Design: Developing actionable plans to restart and sustain the young adult ministry.

Ministerial Skills and Interests Serving the Context

My skills in program design, leadership training, and relational ministry will serve as the foundation for this project. The program leverages my ability to accomplish several tasks, such as engaging through preaching and teaching by delivering scripturally grounded and contextually relevant messages that inspire action. I will equip leaders by facilitating workshops and discussions that empower church leaders with practical skills and spiritual insights. Build community by creating environments where young adults feel valued, supported, and connected to their faith. Evaluate and adapt by assessing the program's effectiveness and making necessary adjustments to ensure long-term sustainability.

What I Seek to Learn Through this Project

Through this project, I aim to deepen my understanding of how intentional discipleship programs can foster spiritual renewal in disrupted contexts. Specifically, I seek to learn: Effective Training Methods: How to best equip leaders with diverse backgrounds and levels of experience, Sustainable Program Design: Strategies for creating a ministry model that adapts to evolving needs, Impact of Discipleship: The tangible effects of structured discipleship on the spiritual growth of young adults and the broader church community, and Contextual Adaptability: How to tailor discipleship approaches to meet the unique challenges and opportunities at Greenleaf Christian Church.

By addressing these objectives, my doctoral project will not only fulfill the immediate needs of Greenleaf Christian Church but also support my growth as a minister dedicated to promoting transformative discipleship and spiritual formation.

The area of ministry addressed in this project is discipleship and spiritual formation for young adult members at Greenleaf Christian Church (GCC) in Goldsboro, North Carolina. Discipleship, which encompasses spiritual formation, has long been a central pillar of the church's mission. However, for several years, the church experienced disruptions in its discipleship programming for young adults, resulting in a significant gap in ministry that has impeded the development of this vital demographic. Young adults—typically defined as individuals aged eighteen to thirty-five—often encounter significant life transitions and are at a crucial stage for spiritual growth. Without targeted ministry programs, the church risks losing the spiritual vitality and engagement of this essential group.

The underlying assumption is that leadership, when properly equipped, has a direct and transformative impact on individuals' faith journeys within a congregation. By providing church leaders with effective tools and strategies for discipleship and spiritual formation, this project aims to revitalize a critical ministry that has become stalled.

The project aims to equip church leaders with the training necessary to rebuild and reinstitute the young adult discipleship ministry at Greenleaf Christian Church. This training will focus on providing church leaders with the theological understanding, practical strategies, and relational tools needed to promote spiritual growth and engagement among young adults. By revitalizing this ministry, the church will assist

young adults in navigating their internal Christian journeys while also empowering them to comprehend their external purpose in the world.

The research method will be qualitative, consisting of interviews, surveys, observations, and examinations. Conducting one-on-one interviews with church leaders and young adults to understand the specific needs and expectations for the discipleship ministry. Surveys will be distributed to leaders to assess their understanding of discipleship needs and the current gaps in ministry. Observing the leaders' participation and engagement before and after the training program's implementation will offer valuable insights into the project's success. Leaders will be responsible for developing ministry models after completing initial training and receiving a rubric with guidelines. The qualitative data will be analyzed to evaluate the effectiveness of the training program, identify areas for improvement, and determine the overall impact and direction for the next phase after the project is completed, which is implementing the young adult program.

Revitalizing young adult discipleship at Greenleaf Christian Church is crucial for ensuring the long-term spiritual health and engagement of this vital demographic. The disruption in discipleship programming over the years has created a gap that must be addressed with intention and theological depth. My Doctor of Ministry project offers a strategic approach to equipping church leaders with the necessary tools, knowledge, and spiritual grounding to restore and sustain a thriving young adult ministry. This project goes beyond program implementation; it aims to foster a culture of discipleship that is deeply rooted in biblical wisdom and responsive to the needs of young adults navigating their faith journeys.

At the heart of this endeavor lies the principle found in Proverbs 22:6 “Train children in the right way, and when old, they will not stray.” This scripture emphasizes the necessity of structured and intentional discipleship from an early age. It also highlights the long-term impact of proper training and spiritual formation on individuals and the broader church community. Just as King Solomon stressed the importance of wisdom and purposeful leadership, modern church leaders must also be prepared to effectively guide young adults. This project aims to address past ministry challenges by integrating theological foundations with practical leadership training, ensuring that discipleship is both spiritually transformational and structurally sustainable.

The seven-session training program created for this project addresses the discipleship gap at Greenleaf Christian Church. By combining theological instruction, spiritual formation practices, leadership development, and program design, this initiative will empower leaders to restore a ministry that is both relevant and impactful. Through qualitative research methods—including interviews, surveys, and observations—the project will also measure the program’s effectiveness and refine it for long-term application. This iterative approach ensures that the discipleship ministry remains adaptable and responsive to the changing needs of young adults within the church.

One of the most critical insights from this research is the importance of relationships in effective discipleship. Young adults flourish in environments where they feel valued, supported, and connected to a faith community that invests in their spiritual growth. Leadership training must therefore go beyond administrative skills and theological knowledge to include mentorship, relational engagement, and community building. By creating a discipleship model that is relational at its core, this project aligns

with both biblical teachings and contemporary ministry best practices. The impact of such an approach goes beyond individual spiritual growth to strengthening the entire church body, ensuring that discipleship is not a segmented program but an integral part of church life.

Looking ahead, the success of this project will depend on church leaders' dedication to continuous learning, adaptation, and mentorship. Implementing the young adult discipleship ministry is not the conclusion of this endeavor, but the beginning of a renewed commitment to nurturing a culture of faith formation and spiritual accountability. The insights gained from this project will provide a foundation for future ministry efforts, offering a replicable model for other churches facing similar challenges in engaging young adults.

Ultimately, this project reaffirms the power of intentional discipleship to transform lives and communities. By equipping leaders with essential skills and theological insights, Greenleaf Christian Church can revive its thriving young adult ministry, which nurtures faith, fosters relationships, and empowers individuals to embrace their calling both within the church and in the broader world. Through sustained commitment and ongoing improvement, the church will create a lasting discipleship legacy that impacts generations to come.

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

The problem statement is that discipleship and spiritual formation programming for young adult members at Greenleaf Christian Church, Disciples of Christ, was disrupted for several years. I hypothesize that if church leaders participate in a seven-session focus training about discipleship and spiritual formation, then they will be equipped to restart and reinstitute the church's young adult discipleship ministry. The research is based on the scripture Proverbs 22:6, which states, “Train children in the right way, and when old, they will not stray.”[1]

Introduction

The Bible is a source that requires analysis that leads to proper interpretation and, ultimately, practical application for one’s life. There is always a lesson in the text and a way that reaches the individual and community of those who believe in the one that established the text. In this writing, the following questions and themes will be uncovered. What is society’s view of children during the time of the text? What is “the way” mentioned in the text? What does it mean to train, specifically children? What were their methods of training? Was there a great departure taking place requiring the need for

[1] Michael David Coogan, Marc Zvi Brettler, Carol Ann Newsom, and Pheme Perkins, eds., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with Apocrypha: New Revised Standard Version* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010).

this training to be addressed? Was there a vast difference between the young and old of that time? Why didn't they want children to depart from this training? What was the journey from youth to adulthood like at that time? Who was speaking? Did they carry bias? Are there hints of liberation over oppression in the text? How does this type of literature affect the interpretation of the text? All these questions will help the reader understand the meaning of this singular sentence in Proverbs 22:6.

The Book of Proverbs is one of a different literary caliber compared to the typical writings within the Bible. To understand its importance and relevance to the proposed project, one must first take a wide lens of the overall nature of the book. This writing will give an overview of the problem at the context location, an understanding of the hypothesis, and the driving force behind the selected text for the project. The view will go from broad to narrow to take a deep dive into the text. "The book of Proverbs has at least two different kinds of materials in it. There are instructions that represent themselves as commonsense teachings from parents to sons, and there are one-line aphorisms that seem to have no particular social context."[2]

This chapter's exegetical work will cover literary, textual, contextual, and historical analysis. The purpose of these exegetical approaches is to go from review to interpretation of the text. The generalisms within this book are what make "close reading" of the text all the more difficult. A rich and thorough investigation needs to take place to uncover the true meaning. Therefore, walking into this text, it is also clear that a concentric meaning may be difficult to ascertain. In those spaces, much of the interpretation heavily depends on the lens of the interpreter. "It is critical to note that

[2] Daniel C. Snell, *Twice-Told Proverbs and the Composition of the Book of Proverbs* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1993), 68.

exegesis does not occur in a vacuum. One reads in context, indeed in multiple contexts. Personal, religious, ecclesial (church), social, economic, ethnic, racial, historical and geographical contexts all affect what is seen when reading a text, and that is actually a good thing."[3]

The disruption of discipleship and spiritual formation programming for young adults at Greenleaf Christian Church represents a critical challenge in sustaining a vibrant and engaged faith community. Addressing this issue requires not only practical strategies but also a firm biblical foundation that informs and shapes the ministry approach. Proverbs 22:6 states, "Train children in the right way, and when old, they will not stray,"[4] which offers significant insight into the theological principles underpinning discipleship, particularly as it relates to nurturing young adults.

This text is directly related to the core objective of the doctoral project, which is to provide church leaders with the necessary training to rebuild and reinstitute the young adult discipleship ministry. Proverbs 22:6 highlights the importance of intentional, formative guidance in shaping the spiritual paths of younger generations. Its timeless principle—that early and consistent training has long-term effects—serves as a theological foundation for equipping leaders to invest in young adults. By grounding their efforts in biblical wisdom, leaders can address the current discipleship gap and foster a ministry that promotes both personal faith development and communal engagement.

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[3] Jonathan Numada, "Elements of Biblical Exegesis: A Basic Guide for Students and Ministers," (2022): 114-117.

[4] Biblical citations are from *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with Apocrypha: New Revised Standard Version*, unless otherwise noted, Proverbs 22:6.

Proverbs 22:6 also aligns with the project's relational nature, emphasizing the role of mentorship and community in the discipleship process. The directive to “train” implies an active, ongoing relationship between the trainer and the one being trained. In the context of Greenleaf Christian Church, this reinforces the idea that sustainable discipleship requires intentional, relationship-based ministry models. This chapter seeks to explore how the passage’s theological insights can inform practical strategies for fostering spiritual growth among young adults.

This introduction outlines the chapter's organization and offers a general overview of the biblical text and themes. The body presents an in-depth exegesis of Proverbs 22:6, while the conclusion synthesizes findings and highlights their relevance to the doctoral project. This study operates on the hypothesis that a focused six-week training program for church leaders can address the discipleship gap and empower them to effectively minister to young adults.

Exegesis of Proverbs 22:6

Literary Analysis

Proverbs is part of the wisdom literature in the Hebrew Bible. It is characterized by its instructional tone and emphasis on practical guidance for living a godly life. Proverbs 22:6, situated within a collection of sayings attributed to Solomon, reflects the overarching theme of wisdom being transmitted across generations.

The literary style of Proverbs is notable for its use of parallelism, a hallmark of Hebrew poetry. Parallelism reinforces key ideas by juxtaposing complementary or

contrasting phrases. In Proverbs 22:6, the structure of the verse supports its instructional purpose: the initial clause, “Train children in the right way,” establishes the directive, while the subsequent clause, “when old, they will not stray,” promises a result. This poetic construction not only enhances memorability but also underscores the cause-and-effect relationship between early instruction and enduring faithfulness.

Moreover, the Book of Proverbs oscillates between communal and individual wisdom, addressing society's collective responsibilities and individuals' personal choices. Proverbs 22:6 exemplifies this dual focus, as the directive to train children is both a communal and familial mandate. One can discern the verse’s dual emphasis on individual moral development and communal continuity by examining its literary structure and placement within the broader collection.

The Role of King Solomon in Writing Proverbs

The authorship of Proverbs is traditionally attributed to King Solomon, whose reputation for wisdom is well-documented in the biblical narrative. Solomon’s wisdom was a divine gift bestowed upon him in response to his request for discernment to govern the people of Israel (1 Kgs. 3:9-12). This divine wisdom profoundly influenced his writings, including Proverbs, which served as a repository of moral and practical guidance for the community.

Solomon likely composed Proverbs at various stages of his life. Early sections of the book may reflect his youthful zeal and reliance on divine wisdom, while later sections could reveal the tempered insights of an older and more experienced leader. By the time he wrote Proverbs 22:6, Solomon’s motive was to impart theoretical knowledge and

ensure the transmission of godly principles to future generations. This urgency reflects his understanding of the covenantal relationship between God and Israel, emphasizing the importance of faithfulness and obedience.

The king's life experiences, including his successes and failures, also shaped his perspective. His later years, marked by spiritual decline and the consequences of idolatry, may have reinforced the importance of early and consistent training in righteousness. Solomon's own deviations from the path of wisdom likely underscored for him the necessity of grounding young people in godly principles from an early age. King Solomon's relationship with the people he ruled was multifaceted, shaped by his wisdom, wealth, and the burdens of his expansive kingdom. Initially, Solomon was highly revered by his people due to the divine wisdom he exhibited, famously displayed in judgments such as the case of the two women claiming the same child (1 Kgs. 3:16-28). This wisdom inspired loyalty and respect, as it positioned him as a ruler who could bring justice and prosperity to the nation.

However, Solomon's relationship with his subjects became strained as his reign progressed. The grandeur of his projects, including the construction of the Temple and his palace, placed significant burdens on the populace through heavy taxation and forced labor (1 Kgs. 5:13-18, 12:4). These policies created discontent among the tribes of Israel, particularly in the northern regions, and sowed seeds of division that later led to the kingdom's split after his death.

Solomon's leadership style reflected both the benefits and pitfalls of centralized authority. His reliance on divine wisdom early in his reign allowed him to govern effectively, promote trade, and establish Israel as a regional power. Yet, as his wealth and

ambitions grew, his focus shifted, and his indulgence in foreign alliances and idolatry weakened his leadership's moral and spiritual integrity (1 Kgs.11:1-10).

This duality in Solomon's leadership likely influenced his writings in Proverbs, including chapter twenty-two. His reflections on humility, justice, and the importance of training the next generation may stem from his recognition of the long-term consequences of consistently failing to lead with those values. By training children in "the right way," Solomon emphasizes the need to instill principles that foster a just and cohesive society, perhaps addressing shortcomings he observed in his later years as a ruler.

Textual Analysis

Key terms in Proverbs 22:6 require careful examination to uncover their depth of meaning. "Train" (חָנַךְ, chanak): The Hebrew term chanak appears sparingly in the Old Testament but is rich in meaning. Often translated as "train" or "initiate," it conveys the idea of dedicating or consecrating someone to a specific purpose. In the context of Proverbs 22:6, chanak implies a deliberate and purposeful process of shaping a child's character and spiritual direction. The term also has connotations of narrowing or focusing, suggesting that training involves guiding children along a defined moral and spiritual path.[5]

"The right way" (דַּרְכּוֹ, derekh): The Hebrew word derekh, commonly rendered as "way" or "path," signifies a course of life or conduct. In ancient Israelite culture, the "way" often represented adherence to divine commandments and covenantal obligations.

[5] Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford, NY: Clarendon Press, 1907), 812.

The phrase "the right way" in Proverbs 22:6 likely refers to a life aligned with God's will, encompassing moral, spiritual, and ethical dimensions.[6]

"Stray" (סוּר, *sur*): The verb *sur*, meaning "to turn aside" or "to deviate," conveys the idea of departing from a prescribed course. In the context of Proverbs 22:6, it implies that proper training can prevent a child from abandoning the path of righteousness, even as they grow older. This term underscores the long-term impact of early instruction, emphasizing the enduring influence of formative guidance.[7]

Philological Criticism

Philological criticism of Proverbs 22:6 involves a detailed examination of its language, particularly the Hebrew terms used in the verse. The term *chanak* ("train") has been extensively debated among scholars. Some argue that its root meaning of "to dedicate" or "to initiate" implies a ceremonial or ritualistic aspect, suggesting that training involves setting a spiritual foundation through formal dedication to God. Others highlight its narrower usage in the Hebrew Bible to emphasize specific moral and spiritual instruction.[8]

The phrase derekh ("way") is also scrutinized for its semantic range. While often interpreted as a moral or spiritual path, its usage in other biblical texts sometimes connotes a more general life trajectory or even practical skill.[9] These nuances enrich our

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[6] Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 813.

[7] Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 814.

[8] Miles V. Van Pelt and Gary D. Pratico, *Basics of Biblical Hebrew Grammar*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2019), 146.

[9] Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 832.

understanding of the passage but also complicate its application, as interpreters must determine the extent to which its meaning is contextually bound. Exploring these terms within their broader lexical and theological contexts enriches our understanding of Proverbs 22:6 and highlights its relevance to modern discipleship efforts.

Contextual Analysis

Understanding the societal context of Proverbs is essential for interpreting its directives. In ancient Israel, education and moral formation were primarily familial responsibilities, with parents bearing the primary duty of instructing children in the ways of Yahweh. This context underscores the communal nature of discipleship, where leaders and families collaborate in nurturing faith.

In the ancient Near East, wisdom was not merely an intellectual pursuit but a practical guide for living. Proverbs 22:6 reflects this cultural emphasis on practical wisdom, where training young people was seen as integral to the community's well-being. The verse’s directive to “train children” implies a proactive approach to moral and spiritual education, with the ultimate goal of ensuring societal stability and covenantal faithfulness.

The role of elders and community leaders in this process cannot be overstated. In a patriarchal society, the transmission of wisdom was often formalized through teaching, mentoring, and ritual practices. Situating Proverbs 22:6 within this cultural framework allows us to gain a deeper appreciation for its emphasis on intentional discipleship as a communal responsibility.

Historical Analysis

The historical setting of Proverbs offers insight into its educational and theological priorities. During the post-exilic period, the Jewish community faced significant cultural and religious pressures, necessitating a focus on preserving identity and faith. The wisdom literature's emphasis on instruction and moral fortitude reflects this context. Proverbs 22:6, with its directive to "train children," aligns with this broader goal of communal preservation. This historical lens highlights the enduring significance of intentional discipleship as a means of fostering resilience and faithfulness in the face of external challenges. The verse's promise that trained children will not stray as they grow older underscores the hope and necessity of maintaining covenantal traditions amidst societal upheaval.[10]

The verse also reflects a time when oral traditions and practical teaching were the primary means of education. Proverbs served as both a pedagogical tool and a repository of collective wisdom, ensuring that each generation received the moral and spiritual guidance necessary to sustain the community's covenantal relationship with God.

Tradition Criticism

Tradition criticism seeks to uncover the historical and cultural traditions that shaped Proverbs 22:6. The verse reflects an educational ethos deeply rooted in ancient Israelite society, where the family unit served as the primary context for moral and spiritual instruction. This tradition aligns with broader Ancient Near Eastern wisdom literature, where parental guidance was a key theme. However, the Israelite tradition

[10] Daniel C. Snell, *Twice-Told Proverbs and the Composition of the Book of Proverbs* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1993), 198.

uniquely emphasized covenantal faithfulness as a communal responsibility, positioning the "way" as adherence to Yahweh's commands rather than secular wisdom.[11]

Form Criticism

Form criticism identifies Proverbs 22:6 as part of a didactic genre, specifically a wisdom aphorism designed for oral transmission. Its brevity and parallelism suggest that it functioned as a mnemonic device, facilitating its use in both domestic and communal settings. The verse's imperative tone—"train," combined with its promise of long-term stability, indicates its role as an instructional maxim for parents and leaders. Form criticism also raises questions about its universality, as the passage reflects an ideal rather than a guaranteed outcome, a characteristic common in proverbial literature.[12]

Redaction Criticism

Redaction criticism explores the editorial process that led to the inclusion of Proverbs 22:6 in its current form. Scholars note that this verse belongs to the "Sayings of the Wise" section (Prov. 22:17–24:22), which may represent an anthology of wisdom teachings compiled during the monarchic or post-exilic periods.[13] The editors likely preserved Proverbs 22:6 for its theological and pedagogical value, emphasizing its applicability across generations. This editorial choice underscores the importance of

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[11] Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 1-15* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 254.

[12] R. N. Whybray, *Wisdom in Proverbs: The Concept of Wisdom in Proverbs 1-9* (London, UK: SCM Press, 1965), 173.

[13] Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs*, 53.

preserving divine wisdom as a timeless guide for community life.[14] These critical approaches, grounded in rigorous analysis, provide a multidimensional understanding of Proverbs 22:6, situating it within its linguistic, cultural, and historical contexts while also illuminating its enduring relevance for discipleship.

Exegesis of Proverbs Chapter Twenty-Two

The twenty-second chapter of Proverbs presents a rich tapestry of wisdom, offering a collection of sayings that emphasize moral, social, and spiritual principles. Verse six stands out as a central axiom within this chapter, underscoring the importance of early and intentional guidance. Grasping the broader context of this chapter provides a deeper insight into the themes and their connection to the directive in verse six.

Verses One Through Five: The Value of Reputation and Humility

The chapter begins with an emphasis on the importance of a good name and the virtues of humility. The verse one states, "A good name is more desirable than great riches; to be esteemed is better than silver or gold." This sets the tone for the chapter by prioritizing character over material wealth. This focus on moral integrity creates a framework for understanding verse six, as the training of children is ultimately aimed at instilling these lasting values.

Verses two through five continues with themes of justice and prudence. Acknowledging God as the creator of all, regardless of social status, emphasizes the

[14] William McKane, *Proverbs: A New Approach* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1970), 164.

significance of equity and humility. Verse four connects humility and the fear of the Lord with riches, honor, and life, reinforcing the notion that spiritual training aligns individuals with divine blessings. These principles of humility, justice, and the fear of the Lord are fundamental to the kind of training Proverbs 22:6 envisions for young people in Proverbs 22:6.[15]

Verses Six through Sixteen: Wisdom in Practice

Verse six serves as the cornerstone of this section, shifting from general principles to practical application. Training children "in the right way" ensures the continuity of the values presented in the preceding verses. This directive embodies the broader wisdom tradition of Proverbs, which sees the cultivation of character and spiritual discernment as lifelong pursuits.

The subsequent verses seven through sixteen address specific behaviors and consequences, including financial responsibility, generosity, and avoiding the company of mockers. These practical admonitions highlight the importance of early instruction. For instance, verse seven warns of the perils of debt, while verse nine praises the virtue of generosity. These lessons illustrate the practical benefits of being trained "in the right way," as individuals who embrace these principles are better prepared to tackle life's challenges.[16]

Verse fifteen explicitly addresses child training: "Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline will drive it far away." This reinforces the need for

[15] Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs*, 124.

[16] Snell, *Twice-Told Proverbs*, 142.

intentional correction and guidance, aligning closely with the promise of verse six. Together, these verses present a holistic view of wisdom training that encompasses moral, financial, and relational dimensions.

Verses Seventeen Through Twenty-Nine: The Sayings of the Wise

The latter portion of Proverbs chapter twenty-two shifts to the "Sayings of the Wise," a collection of admonitions that further illustrate the application of wisdom in daily life. Verses seventeen through nineteen urge the reader to listen to wisdom and apply it to their heart, emphasizing the relational aspect of wisdom as something imparted and nurtured. These relational dynamic echoes the mentorship model implied in verse six.

Verses twenty-two through twenty-nine address social justice, diligence, and fairness, themes that resonate with the broader purpose of training children to become responsible, God-fearing adults. The emphasis on fairness to the poor and integrity in work (verses 22-23 and 29) ties into the overarching message of Proverbs 22:6 by illustrating the societal benefits of early moral and spiritual instruction.

Connection to Verse Six

Proverbs chapter twenty-two presents a cohesive vision of wisdom that begins with foundational principles, transitions to practical applications, and culminates in a call to relational and communal accountability. Verse six is not an isolated statement but a pivotal part of this vision. It highlights the role of early training in ensuring that the values and behaviors extolled throughout the chapter are internalized and lived out over a lifetime.

By embedding verse six within the broader context of Proverbs chapter twenty-two, it becomes clear that the directive to "train children in the right way" is not just about individual development but about sustaining a community founded on justice, humility, and the fear of the Lord. This connection emphasizes the importance of intentional discipleship as a means of nurturing young adults who can contribute to a flourishing faith community.

Summary and Implications for the Doctoral Project

The study of Proverbs 22:6 reveals a profound theological framework for discipleship, emphasizing intentionality, community collaboration, and long-term faithfulness. These principles are directly applicable to revitalizing the young adult ministry at Greenleaf Christian Church. By equipping church leaders with theological understanding, practical strategies, and relational tools rooted in this biblical foundation, the proposed six-week training program can effectively address the discipleship gap.

Proverbs 22:6 illustrates that relationships are essential for sustainable discipleship. The verse's call to "train children in the right way" suggests an intentional, relational process that extends beyond mere knowledge transfer to the cultivation of meaningful connections. This aligns with the project's emphasis on relationship-based ministry, where church leaders serve as mentors, guides, and spiritual companions for young adults. Relationships foster the trust, accountability, and encouragement needed for young people to navigate their internal Christian journeys and external purposes in the world.

By embedding relational discipleship within the church's programming, leaders can create a sustainable model that supports young adults through life's challenges and transitions. Proverbs 22:6—that those trained in the right way will not stray—underscores the transformative power of early and consistent relational investment. This insight not only reinforces the project's theological foundation but also provides a practical blueprint for fostering a thriving and engaged faith community.

Furthermore, the relationships fostered during this process reflect the biblical model of discipleship in the ministry of Jesus, who emphasized personal relationships with His disciples as a means of teaching, mentoring, and empowering them. This relational dynamic nurtures a sense of belonging and purpose, which is particularly vital for young adults as they navigate the complexities of faith and identity in today's context. When church leaders emphasize intentional mentorship, they not only provide young adults with spiritual tools but also cultivate a culture of mutual support and accountability that improves the overall health of the faith community.

Furthermore, this approach aligns with contemporary insights into effective ministry that emphasize the importance of relationships in nurturing spiritual growth and engagement. Research in church leadership consistently underscores the importance of mentorship and small-group dynamics as crucial elements in sustaining faith communities. These findings support the biblical principle expressed in Proverbs 22:6, demonstrating its enduring relevance and practical application in addressing the discipleship challenges modern churches face.

The implementation of relationship-based discipleship strategies at Greenleaf Christian Church has the potential to yield long-term benefits, not just for the young

adults directly involved but for the entire congregation as well. As these young adults deepen their faith and take on leadership roles, they can become catalysts for renewal and transformation within the church. This cyclical process of mentorship and discipleship ensures the ongoing vitality of the community, grounded in the biblical wisdom of training and relational investment. The lasting truth of Proverbs 22:6 serves as both a theological anchor and a practical guide for this transformative journey.

Drawing correlations to Solomon's leadership style offers church leaders a biblical perspective to assess their practices, rectify past mistakes, and guarantee sustainable ministry revitalization, particularly in young adult discipleship.

Leaders should acknowledge the role of humility and wisdom. Solomon’s early reign, marked by divine wisdom and humility (1 Kgs. 3), illustrates the importance of seeking God’s guidance in leadership decisions. Church leaders can emulate this reliance on wisdom by prioritizing prayer and scriptural study when revitalizing ministries.

They should avoid leadership pitfalls. Solomon's later years reveal the consequences of overburdening his people with excessive labor and taxes (1 Kgs. 12). This serves as a cautionary tale for leaders, emphasizing the need to balance ambition with compassion and avoid burnout in ministry teams.

Church leaders should promote relationship-based discipleship. Just as Solomon’s wisdom was relationally imparted through teachings like Proverbs, church leaders must foster mentoring relationships. Proverbs 22:6’s emphasis on training aligns with building meaningful connections, ensuring that discipleship efforts are personal and impactful.

It is key to incorporate long-term vision. Vision that goes beyond the current culture and context allows those being led to trust the process. Solomon’s focus on building a lasting

legacy through the Temple underscores the value of long-term planning. Similarly, leaders must strategize for sustainability, ensuring young adult ministries are adaptable and continually relevant to future generations. By reflecting on Solomon's successes and failures, leaders can develop ministry approaches that emphasize relational investment, humility, and foresight, fostering both immediate and enduring growth in young adult discipleship.

Beyond relationships, sustainable discipleship requires a long-term vision that transcends immediate challenges. Solomon's commitment to building the Temple illustrates the importance of strategic planning to create something enduring. In the same way, church leaders must develop discipleship programs that remain flexible for future generations while being rooted in biblical principles. Jesus modeled this approach by investing significantly in the lives of His disciples, preparing them to continue His ministry. Importantly, these disciples were young adults, showing that this stage of life is essential for cultivating future leaders. Jesus did not simply instruct them in formal settings; He journeyed with them, shared meals with them, and engaged in life alongside them, exemplifying a discipleship method that was immersive and transformative. This relational approach ensured that His teachings were not just heard but were internalized through daily experiences and personal interactions.

For young adult discipleship to be truly effective, church leaders must adopt a similar model, prioritizing relationships, consistency, and long-term investment. Programs should focus not only on spiritual education but also on creating authentic spaces where young adults feel seen, valued, and equipped to grow in faith. A sustainable discipleship ministry requires patience, dedication, and a commitment to guiding young

people beyond momentary engagement toward lifelong faithfulness. Just as Jesus equipped His disciples to continue His work, the goal of young adult discipleship must be to empower them to take ownership of their faith, serve their communities, and ultimately disciple others. When leaders intentionally invest in relational and long-term discipleship strategies, they not only strengthen individual spiritual growth but also build a legacy of faith that extends far beyond their own generation.

CHAPTER THREE

HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

New York was on the verge of abolition, and the northern states were not yet as reliant on the income from cotton and tobacco plantations. So, prospective slave owners would often bring their slaves to New York and declare them freed to avoid having to give them up. John M. Mason involves one such slave in this situation, who had been taught to read by one of his previous masters in the South.

At this point in the history of the United States, slavery had been abolished in many countries, and the importation of new slaves had been prohibited. The cotton gin had not yet been invented, so the profitability of cotton and tobacco was not as significant as it would become in the future. With cotton and tobacco as the primary sources of income in the Southern states, the slaves labored in the fields, drawing on the limited religious teachings they received from their masters, who used selected passages from the Bible to instill the idea of obedience and servitude in their slaves.

John M. Mason was a Christian minister, and gaining a better understanding of his character will help clarify his motives for allowing an ex-slave to start a Sunday

School. After reviewing several secondary sources, piecing together a timeline of Mason's life proves to be slightly challenging.[1]

John M. Mason's decision to allow a slave named Cato (also known as Catherine, Katherine, or Katy) to start a Sunday school is a significant event in his life. Mason, the fourth child of Dr. John Mitchell Mason and his wife Joanna B. LaNauze, was named after his grandfather, John Mitchell Mason, and was born a few months after his father's death on 19 July 1799. The loss of his father, his mother's subsequent financial hardships, and his grandfather's death in 1815 profoundly impacted Mason's personal and family life. With a scholarship, Mason entered Columbia College in 1816, where he became a member of the Philolexian Literary Society and a top student.[2]

After graduating in 1819, Mason studied law and was admitted to the bar in 1822. He married Mary Anna MacIntosh on 20 August 1823, and the couple had nine children together. After a brief stint in law, Mason changed career paths and went to Princeton Theological Seminary, where he began his studies in 1823. On 3 May 1827, he became the pastor of the newly organized Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church of Duane Street in New York. This would become his distinguished place of labor until his death in 1873.[3]

Early evidence of Mason's anti-slavery views is found in a letter from Eli N. Caruthers. Mason met Caruthers in 1816 when he entered Columbia, and their friendship lasted over the years. Caruthers wrote the letter praising Mason's efforts as a "fellow

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[1] John M. Mason, *The Complete Works of John M. Mason, D.D.*, ed. Ebenezer Mason, vol. 2 (New York, NY: R Carter and Brothers, 1919), 24.

[2] Mason, *The Complete Works of John M. Mason, D.D.*, 27.

[3] William Buell Sprague, *Annals of the American Pulpit: Presbyterian*, vol. 2 (New York, NY: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1859), 32.

laborer in that part of Zion's vineyard, where American slavery exists, and where there is so much need of information on the subject of the right of the church" (9 June 1832).[4] Mason had requested that Caruthers write a historical document outlining the origins of the Old-School division. He is remembered for his contributions to the Old-School Presbyterian Church, his work in American religious history, and his advancements in church education. However, his most significant contribution to the anti-slavery cause may well have been his support for Catherine to establish a Sunday school.[5]

While this project identifies a shift or need for development in something that is lacking in the church, there was a time when this was being developed and established within the church. Catherine Ferguson, a Black woman born into slavery, founded the first documented Sunday school in the United States.[6] Her life's work is an intriguing story that helps others understand how to overcome adversity while focusing on the development of others. Many forces worked against her that could have hindered her ability to lead and teach in ministry. She was a slave, a woman, and illiterate, yet her boldness enabled her to cultivate an area that has lasting effects. This made the program she started a sustainable movement whose fundamental aspects remain intact all these years later. Not only did her work uncover biblical truths, but she also facilitated growth and development for young adults.[7]

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[4] Sprague, *Annals of the American Pulpit: Presbyterian*, 39.

[5] Jacob Van Vechten, *Memoirs of John M. Mason, D.D., S.T.P.* (New York, NY: R. Carter and Brothers, 1856), 67.

[6] Allen Hartvik, "Catherine Ferguson: Black Founder of a Sunday School," *Negro History Bulletin* 59, no. 1 (1996): 1-2.

[7] Margaret D. Pagan, *More Than a Slave: The Life of Katherine Ferguson* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2003), 101.

The history of Sunday school overall has a backdrop of general education. Instruction often considered the whole student, not just the study of the Bible. If students were lacking in any area of study; they were addressed during Sunday school classes. Reading, writing, and mathematics were often discussed to further enrich the students' lives.[8]

When searching for a historical figure or movement, there was an initial struggle to find something directly related to the frame of reference for future work. Points of interest included young adult Christian movements and young adult social justice groups that emerged from the church. With further investigation, it became clear that the establishment of Sunday school in America would provide context for the spiritual formation journey among young adults, whether present or lacking in the church.[9] Catherine Ferguson's story is one that is not often told. Many others are attributed with founding Sunday School and are generally considered more astute and significant than those of African descent.

Background of Catherine Ferguson

Catherine was born around 1779, a year when London transported approximately 4,607 slaves to the Caribbean to address the labor shortage caused by indentured servants refusing to accept substandard pay.[10] It is also the year the African Committee became one of the directors of the East India Company. Catherine Ferguson was born several

[8] Anne M. Boylan, *Sunday School: The Formation of an American Institution, 1790–1880* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988), 29.

[9] Boylan, *Sunday School: The Formation of an American Institution, 1790–1880*, 33.

[10] Hartvik, "Catherine Ferguson, Black Founder of a Sunday-School," 176.

years after New York City, Wales, and Scotland voted to gradually abolish slavery. This period saw slavery largely concealed rather than openly practiced. However, Catherine was not shielded from the Quaker's gradual abolition of slavery from 1777; rather, she was deeply involved, as her own parents were enslaved.

The freedom papers state that a person is born free but has lost their freedom due to being enslaved. This statement seems to contradict Catherine's birth status because both her parents were slaves, making her a slave as well. Since she was born into slavery, there are no records of her birth or her parents' identities. Additionally, she was unable to pass down her freedom to her children, as they would also lack known parentage and any record of being born free. It is understandable that Catherine arranged for her son Caesar to marry a free woman, fearing her children might suffer the same fate she did.[11]

The Context of Slavery

The early 1800s were a time of great achievement and promise for the free Black community in New York City. The relative openness of society, the rudimentary state of racial ideology, and the diverse forms of abolitionist sentiment combined to create an environment of opportunity for upward mobility, independence, and social closeness. The emerging free community of this period included highly skilled and enterprising individuals, bold public expressions of African identity, and remarkable interdependence between races. Women, too, found unprecedented opportunities to assert their autonomy and self-sufficiency, even as they continued to face the oppression of racial and gender subjugation. Yet historical accounts of Black New York during this time are often

[11] Hartvik, "Catherine Ferguson: Black Founder of a Sunday School," 1-2.

presented as if the entire history of Blacks in New York were solely defined by the subjugation experienced in the early twentieth century.[12]

In the early 1800s, African Americans in New York City were still fighting for equality. They were primarily people of African descent whose ancestors had been enslaved in Dutch New Amsterdam and English New York. As the city grew more commercial and less agricultural, the number of slaves decreased. Ultimately, the system was abolished on July 4, 1827. Although New York emancipated them, Marable notes in his book that America's capitalist society did not expect them to stay in the city. Throughout slavery and afterward, blacks were consistently viewed as second-class.[13]

The All-White Church

Ferguson was a Northern Presbyterian missionary with limited opportunities to minister, as whites considered it degrading to perform religious tasks among the slaves. While she acknowledged the blacks' inherent right to practice their religion according to their interpretation, Ferguson believed that blacks held a special role in missionary work. Her view was not well received by her church associates, as the missionary was initially unaware of the racial hierarchy that had formed within the Christian Church. Her desire to free blacks from spiritual slavery began to alienate her from her religious peers.

Historically and biblically, it was a well-known fact that to gain entrance into the kingdom of heaven, one must be baptized. For slaves in the Antebellum South, Christian

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[12] Rhoda Golden Freeman, *The Free Negro in New York City in the Era Before the Civil War* (New York, NY: Columbia University, 1966), 129.

[13] Margaret D. Pagan, *More Than a Slave: The Life of Katherine Ferguson* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2003), 98.

baptism held a dual significance. It marked their birth into the church fellowship and conferred a new status within Christian society. This possibility was hinted at by a female slave named Grace, who, upon receiving baptism, stated, "They're this way allowed on us to freedom and liberty. We can't be slaved no more," referring how their admission into the church granted them a status equal to that of whites, and reflecting the common belief among slaves that deeper communion with Christian rituals signified the end of forced servitude.[14] In theory, black Christians were devoted members of the congregation. However, in practice, blacks were typically relegated to the church gallery or seats in the back, leading some to conclude that the body of Christ was divided into two halves—the white half and the black. This notion spurred Catherine Ferguson's effort to bridge the racially based division in Christian fellowship by inviting slaves into her home for worship.

Catherine's Determination

Initially, the church would send a carriage on Sundays to pick up Catherine and return her home after Sunday school. However, when this became inconvenient for the church, a relative would provide transportation instead. Catherine always felt at home in church; it was like a second home, and everyone looked out for her. She made many friends and created numerous pleasant memories, but she also recalls "Never can I forget the prejudice against me—at times so strong I wished to take myself from the situation." Catherine did not return home over every minor issue she faced. In those moments, she felt the sting of prejudice, which gave her the strength to overcome it for the benefit of

[14] Pagan, *More Than a Slave*, 117.

her community. Throughout her struggles for justice and equality, she remembered the kindness and consideration shown to her by the Cators and other church members. At any later encounter, she wished to avoid causing them or anyone else undue embarrassment.

Henry Hughes, Catherine's tutor who would later marry her, mentioned that on her way to Mr. Cator's for lessons, where a Gospel service was taking place, Catherine heard voices singing and decided to enter to listen. A black church member, Mrs. Johnstone, noticed her and asked if she was visiting her mother. When she learned that Catherine did not realize the service was for colored folks only, she permitted her to stay after ensuring it was acceptable with Mr. Cator. Mrs. Johnstone and a few others contacted the Session and arranged for the very surprised Mr. Cator to send a letter to Rev. John Ferguson requesting that Catherine be allowed to attend the white Sunday School.[15] When Mr. Cator asked if Catherine would be welcome, Mrs. Johnstone, who understood the sentiments of the congregation, replied, "Naw, but I think we ought to take them in and show them how to live it."[16] This would mark the beginning of Catherine's lifelong journey to "win with love and understanding the right of her people to take their place in the life and work of the race to which they belong."[17]

Overcoming Prejudice and Discrimination

Despite intense hostility and numerous obstacles, Catherine managed to persuade the elders at the John Street Presbyterian Church to permit her to conduct the first Sunday

[15] Pagan, *More Than a Slave*, 132.

[16] Pagan, *More Than a Slave*, 132.

[17] Pagan, *More Than a Slave*, 135.

school for black children in 1807. The session began with eight pupils, and by the end of the year, the number had increased to approximately sixty. The behavior of the children's parents indicated that the religious instruction was positively impacting the families. Consequently, it came as no surprise to Catherine that she faced considerable opposition from the more privileged members of the church.

Some members of the congregation were firmly convinced that having such a school associated with the church was not in their best interests. In the long run, it would likely promote the unification of presbyteries, something they had hoped to prevent. Meetings were held to discuss the issue, and ultimately, the elders of the session decided to inform her that the trustees had ordered her to close the school.[18] Catherine pretended to comply but ultimately withdrew from the church, leaving the school in the hands of her sister and a friend who had been assisting her.

They had since taken up residence in a house on Fayette Street and established what they called a society for the very poor in that neighborhood, which served as a substitute for Sunday school. This, too, was eventually abandoned, and Catherine, along with her sister and her friend, decided to start a Sabbath school for the city’s poor based on the free school system. It was intended to be independent of any specific church and would be open to anyone willing to teach or send their children for instruction. However, the plan had to be abandoned due to her sister's illness, and with chaos reigning from the war, the following years were spent quietly caring for her own family.[19]

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[18] Sprague, *Annals of the American Pulpit: Presbyterian*, 72.

[19] Rhoda Golden Freeman, *The Free Negro in New York City in the Era Before the Civil War* (New York, NY: Columbia University, 1966), 139.

The Impact of Catherine's Sunday School

Catherine's Sunday School class provided black children with an opportunity to receive an education and take steps toward a better life. This consistently brought the black and white communities together. Catherine frequently organized fundraisers for her class and the children. They diligently worked to raise money for child welfare, and it was noted that national campaigns for child welfare in America may have drawn inspiration from the activities of Catherine and her class. In the local area, her class made a significant impact. At a conference held by the Glasgow Congregational Union, it was stated that "we are told that the girl-captains have revolutionized, and the black children have invaded, one of our Congregational Churches. That is a great step forward, and an experiment that may lead to a solution for a difficult problem."[20]

Her class also attracted significant interest from the local liberal white communities, and as she had hoped, it opened the minds of many to the black cause. For one of the rare times in Catherine's life, the support she received from her own Community Centre for black children was non-existent. During the early years, her students often went hungry, forcing her to spend her own money on their food. This, in turn, took a toll on Catherine's health; she ended up giving up her class, and soon after, she died.[21]

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[20] Freeman, *The Free Negro in New York City in the Era Before the Civil War*, 129.

[21] Amanda B. Moniz, "To Remember or to Forget: The Story of Philanthropists Catherine Williams Ferguson and Isabella Marshall Graham's Unlikely Interracial Collaboration," *Commonplace* 22, no. 4 (2022).

Navigating a Hostile Environment

In the early 1800s, when Catherine was coming of age, New York was a place where slavery and racism were deeply embedded in the social order, and black people were systematically denied the most basic rights and opportunities. Catherine's father, James Brown Harris, was a well-respected barber in New York who used his position and income to provide his children with a better education and a degree of independence. When Harris died in 1812, he left Catherine and her mother a substantial inheritance for the time, including a home and real estate. This inheritance would prove to be a crucial asset for Catherine in her continued social mobility and in her ability to care for her children and pursue her life's work. Due to her father's relative standing in the community and the education she received, Catherine developed a sense of self and confidence that, combined with her profound compassion and sympathy for children and the poor, would guide her actions to significantly impact many lives.[22]

In her 1805 testimony, Catherine expresses confidence in her ability to free her child, citing her status as the child of free parents and the child's age of about 3 months. This confidence, along with her awareness of confronting the unjust system of slavery, reflects the social and cultural capital that Catherine had acquired during that period. Her literacy enabled her to effectively document her efforts to reclaim her lost children and confront their kidnapper in court. Undertaking such a task was rare for a black woman at the time, and her strength and determination to challenge a hostile environment demonstrate her belief in the inefficacy of slavery and pervasive racism in determining a person's true worth and potential.

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[22] Hartvik, "Catherine Ferguson: Black Founder of a Sunday School," 1-2.

Empowering Black Children

Catherine Ferguson believed wholeheartedly in taking history into her own hands. For her, this meant ensuring that black children were imbued with the strength, knowledge, and positive identity essential to the struggle ahead. She fought tenaciously against feelings of inferiority and hopelessness within the black community and rejected any strategy based on black youth merely feeling 'better about themselves.' Ferguson's approach to liberating children was proactive and militant.[23]

On an individual level, this meant she was often seen pulling children aside to correct their posture or encouraging them to walk with their heads held high, to stop mimicking contemporary slang of the day, or simply to affirm their intelligence and potential to achieve anything they desired. However, what captivated the children most was her tough love and her politics. She said of them, "If you let them, they'll tear the world apart finding a better way of life. My job is to guide that energy toward radical change."[24]

Gaining Support and Allies

That same year, she was elected as a committee member for one of the twelve schools in the Colored Schools Society. After the school's teacher died from cholera, the trustees appointed her as the chief instructor of the challenging school, only rescinding the appointment after seven months due to her self-assurance. Two years later, she was to serve in the same role at another African Free School.

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[23] Pagan, *More Than a Slave*, 141.

[24] Edwin Wilbur Rice, *The Sunday-School Movement, 1780-1917, and the American Sunday-School Union, 1817-1917* (New York, NY: American Sunday-School Union, 1917), 42.

In 1832, she became a matron for the African School for Learners of Color, which was supported by both the city and the Public-School Society. The leaders of this society granted permission to the trustees of the African Free Schools to use one of the schools they operated, along with equipment left by the Public-School Society. Ferguson's involvement in this initiative illustrates the activism surrounding the education of Black children by repurposing schools previously aimed at white children.[25]

Eager to improve the opportunities for children in New York, Ferguson worked with like-minded individuals and organizations to accomplish her goals. In 1830, Ferguson and her friend, Mrs. Hanson, founded the first Sunday school for black children at the church. Having received permission from the New York House Missionary Society, the school was offered to children in the immediate vicinity. Determined to provide a quality education for New York's black children, Ferguson knew that the way to do so was to gain personable allies.

Catherine Ferguson's rise to influence did not come without resistance. White supremacists constantly aimed to attack the movement and frustrate its purposes. Conversely, Catherine Ferguson also clashed with other leaders in the AFSC. She had trouble dealing with individuals who did not understand the purpose of the work camp and wanted to send Black youth to training programs at white schools. Catherine Ferguson, like most Black Power advocates, was saddened by the appearance of the movement "For equal rights with the Jew!" At times, it was difficult to distinguish the line between escape and rebellion.[26]

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[25] Freeman, *The Free Negro in New York City in the Era Before the Civil War*, 132.

[26] Pagan, *More Than a Slave*, 172.

Catherine's Legacy

In the analysis of Catherine's life, looking forward to the legacy she has left for the future generations of both African Americans and women. Ferguson was a woman who fought for the rights of African Americans and women since adolescence. Catherine pushed the limits by taking roles from working at an all-white Camp Fire Girls camp to starting clubs for African American girls, to speaking at a college commencement, and finally by becoming a community organizer. Catherine has always had high aspirations for her people and never ceased to make progress for equal rights for men and women.[27]

It is essential that the story of Catherine M. Ferguson does not get buried in the archives. It is a story that needs to be retold repeatedly, a story that educates and brings hope to many generations. This is the most important way to make a lasting impact on the future. By sharing Catherine's story and the reasons behind her actions, both children and adults can be inspired to create change for themselves, their children, and future generations to ensure a more promising future. This includes a diverse group of educated and undereducated individuals who can relate to struggle as a catalyst for change. Retelling Catherine's story from an educational perspective would highlight her life at various points to demonstrate what education in capable hands can achieve for a marginalized group. This could serve as a guide, offering a comprehensive portrait of the efforts to improve life for oppressed people everywhere.[28]

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[27] Pagan, *More Than a Slave*, 190.

[28] Catherine A. Latimer, "Catherine Ferguson," *Negro History Bulletin* 5, no. 2 (1941): 38.

Breaking Down Racial Barriers

Catherine's efforts to break down racial barriers began during her childhood and continued until the end of her life. Growing up in a predominantly white community and attending a school that did not provide her with a quality education made her increasingly aware of the racial inequality that stood out starkly in the United States. To avoid feeling singled out and oppressed as a Black person in a white church.[29] Her interracial experiences at the services significantly influenced her views on racism and discrimination, shaping the way she revolutionized Black education through the schools she founded.

The racism she witnessed and faced firsthand throughout her life fueled her ambition to create a more tolerant society. With this motivation, she was able to change policies that hindered Black education, both in her own school and in other schools in New York and New Jersey. Through her continuous efforts to understand the issues surrounding racism, she achieved significant change that worked toward breaking down the barriers between races.

Her efforts also helped bring an understanding of social issues to others in her field, including the superintendent who assisted her in getting her first job. She collaborated with him to develop a richer curriculum that would equip students with the knowledge and skills necessary to change their circumstances. Through these influential policies, Catherine laid the groundwork for her students to improve their station in life.[30]

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[29] Edwin Wilbur Rice, *The Sunday-School Movement and the American Sunday-School Union* (Philadelphia, PA: Union Press, 1917), 54.

[30] Freeman, *The Free Negro in New York City*, 72.

Contributions to Education and Equality

Throughout her life, Catherine Ferguson held several positions within the school system, each demonstrating the importance of education in the Black community. During the early years of the Civil War, Catherine became the principal of a school for White children. Proving her worth through skill and dedication, it was not long before the school became integrated. However, local White parents, angry at the thought of Black children attending school with their kids, soon demanded the establishment of a new school for Black children in the area. They believed that by removing Catherine from her position, they could ensure that she would not follow the Black children to their new school.[31]

Catherine opened a new and better school for black children, who had been receiving education in makeshift environments like the basement of a church. She became the first black woman in New York to establish a school for black children and the first to receive a charter for such a school from the Board of Education. For the rest of her life, she served as a schoolteacher during a time when the average salary for public school teachers was a meager $500 a year. Her roles varied from principal to teaching newly freed slaves on the Sea Islands during the Civil War, culminating in her final position with the public schools in Charleston, South Carolina.[32]

While researching and compiling this manuscript, Catherine Ferguson's journey offered numerous valuable lessons. Actively confronting social injustices to facilitate positive change is incredibly challenging. Her effort to overcome gender-related barriers,

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[31] Pagan, *More Than a Slave*, 103.

[32] Pagan, *More Than a Slave*, 125.

which are often overlooked even in today's society, is no simple task. She also demonstrated that bridging the gender gap across the diverse groups in the workforce is a formidable challenge. It requires a strong leader committed to the cause and the ability to confront a resistant majority—qualities she has since developed.

Catherine Ferguson's Sunday school was the first formal education for African American children and adults in New York who had long been denied literacy. On a personal level, Catherine must have felt an immense sense of achievement and satisfaction from what she accomplished in starting Sunday school. Although she and others could never have envisioned the full extent of their work's future impact, they would have reveled in knowing they were doing everything possible to help their fellow citizens in the present.

In a letter to the Palladium of the Press in 1829, Cato expressed the urgent need felt by illiterate African Americans to find a preacher of their own race and to have a proper place to worship.[33] Sunday schools were often the only means by which African Americans could receive an education before the Civil War, and these institutions played a crucial role in maintaining hope for liberation and freedom by striving to gain literacy and religious knowledge. The emphasis Ferguson placed on deepening the religious faith and educating both enslaved and free blacks in New York was a necessary step in preparing the people for the challenging times ahead.

Catherine Ferguson's vision for a more just society lived on after her death in 1854. Several women in her family followed her lead, becoming teachers and activists. Her impact on the city is clear. At the time of her death, several public schools existed for

[33] Van Vechten, *Memoirs of John M. Mason,* 54.

Black students in New York City, even though segregation was not legally enforced. Free education for Black individuals was suspended during the Civil War Draft Riots in 1863; however, Black New Yorkers continued to fight for equal access to education in the years following the Revolution.[34] In 2003, New York City opened a new public school aimed at breaking the cycle of poverty, specifically for pregnant and parenting teens. This school was named the Catherine Ferguson Academy, with the goal of providing the population it serves with the same opportunities that Ferguson envisioned for her students over two centuries earlier.

In eighteenth-century Scotland, all forms of education were nearly entirely excluded from women of all social standings. The only known involvement of Ferguson in girls' education occurred in 1797 when she subscribed to Mercy Lockhart's Seminary, an initiative to establish a school in the country for female education. This unfortunate lack of engagement in girls' education, along with the brief existence of the school, makes it the least progressive aspect of Ferguson's educational efforts during her lifetime. However, it is important to note that there were few opportunities for charitable work among women, and a public initiative for educating girls would not emerge until the nineteenth century, when women had more time and resources to engage in charitable activities outside the oversight of male relatives.

Nevertheless, one of Ferguson's long-term goals for her boys' school was to place the more capable students into apprenticeships as teachers for the school's less affluent children. While no strong evidence exists to confirm that Ferguson maintained this

[34] Pagan, *More Than a Slave*, 214.

program, it was an unusual and groundbreaking initiative for the time, and, if successful, could have created educational opportunities for young men from poorer classes.[35]

Although Catherine Ferguson had some zealously held ideals about women's rights and the significance of educating and employing women, her impact in this area may initially seemed limited. Her primary focus was on the education and empowerment of children, especially boys. It is notable, however, that despite her main goal of rescuing children from lives as street peddlers by providing them with academic education and vocational training in her schools, she stated in her 1793 memoir that "I have not yet taken upon myself to speak of the Female Charity School."[36] Her expression of regret at not yet addressing girls' education implies that while she did not commence any formal educational efforts for girls, she aspired to do so and would have considered such an effort an extension of her charitable activities.[37]

While intersectionality is a feminist theory that has rebirthed over the last century, Catherine Ferguson embodied it throughout her life. The abolitionist movement was accomplishing feats in New York, where she supported it in hopes of applying the same strategies to black oppression to women's oppression. A significant aspect of American history is when women's rights and abolitionism amalgamated.

Women are systematically oppressed due to their race, religion, class, or sexuality, and Ferguson was tired of it. Although women abolitionists were often used as a showcase to demonstrate the acceptability of women’s sovereignty, Ferguson was very

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[35] Freeman, *The Free Negro in New York City,* 71.

[36] Catherine A. Latimer, "Catherine Ferguson," *Negro History Bulletin* 5, no. 2 (1941): 38.

[37] Van Vechten, *Memoirs of John M. Mason,* 41.

vocal about the need for women to have their own distinct identity rights. Women in the abolitionist movement also faced challenges in finding their place in a space directed toward men. Nevertheless, Ferguson continued to collaborate with the anti-slavery society while establishing her own organization to apply the same tactics for liberation through rights and education.

During the Civil War, Ferguson was dedicated to improving the lives of her sons and their peers. She believed the harsh conditions black men faced when enlisting in the army stemmed from a lack of self-respect and education. This belief inspired her to establish what she called a "Sunday School on the Battlefield," offering reading classes and moral instruction to troops from the twelfth regiment.[38] Although this was a gesture of kindness toward struggling black soldiers, it was rooted in her conviction that blacks could only advance through self-esteem and self-education. At the time of the Civil War, she also adopted a little girl from the colored orphan asylum, likely due to her understanding of the plight faced by parentless children. Her commitment to education for women led her to assist a young black girl, who wished to learn to read and sew through daily visits and needlework lessons.

[38] Freeman, *The Free Negro in New York City in the Era Before the Civil War*, 134.

CHAPTER FOUR

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

Ecclesiology - The Study of the Church

A simple understanding of ecclesiology is that one is called to believe and then to serve. If Jesus could represent the victimized, raise the dead, heal the sick, and love unconditionally, then believers can aspire to do the same. This defines the purpose of the church. There is no doctrine within the church more important than the belief in God and service. Ephesians chapter four will help clarify the purpose of the church—both as an institution and for its members.

Paul begins by urging the people of Ephesus to live worthy of their calling through humility, gentleness, patience, and love. My faith tradition highly regards verses four through six: "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all."[1] The phrase "one Lord, one faith, one baptism" echoes through the halls of many Baptist churches. It forms the core of their understanding of God, which leads to the church's ordinances: the Eucharist and Baptism.

[1] Michael D. Coogan, ed., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible* (Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010), 1241.

Not only does this message to the church at Ephesus clearly relate to the unity of the church, but it also references the monotheistic presence of God. Unfortunately, the church has used this language to further promote Christian supremacy in the world. We are the one true faith; it is our way or the highway. However, as my theological perspective continues to develop, I believe that we are not supreme in religiosity. I believe that Christianity is not the only path to God. There are many paths to God, and I am primarily concerned that we all arrive there. A life without God is a life steeped in nothingness. I understand that nothing can be accomplished without God's hand working in and through it. Isn't that what Jesus taught as he ministered here on earth? Regardless of your status or place in society, the most evident fact is that God is the final authority.

> Reflecting on the latter portion of that fourth chapter, Ephesians 4:14-16 states:
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> > We should be careful to not be tossed about with every wind of doctrine. But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.[2]

I am learning that I must always remember I am first called to believe and then to serve—serving God and humankind while ensuring that both my vertical and horizontal relationships are maintained and influenced by love. For if I do not believe, how do I know who, what, when, how, and why I am serving?

I believe the mission of the church is to understand the theological framework and historical context while putting faith into action. The theologians who have a deep understanding of justice and serve as my personal resources for change and liberation include Peter Heltzel, James Cone, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Delores Williams, Obery

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[2] Coogan, *New Oxford Annotated Bible,* 1024.

Hendricks, and Howard Thurman. Heltzel's *Jesus and Justice* and *Resurrection City* are prophetic calls to serve, raise awareness, and initiate change within the community.[3] While I appreciate the concept of "kingdom building" in relation to mission work, a more practical term that resonates with everyone is "community building." Those who are oppressed, dispossessed, disinherited, and simply down and out need a prophetic voice to guide them through their own wilderness of despair. I often reflect on Dr. Hendricks's profound statement about providing a "voice to the voiceless," which resonates deeply within me daily. Heltzel's ability to highlight the ills within our social structures while urging us to action exemplifies what a theological/prophetic voice is meant to do.[4] Once you understand, it is time to act. My understanding of the church and its mission, apart from ecclesial hierarchy, aligns with the simple teaching of Jesus to go out and labor. Here lies the understanding: now go out and serve the community and the world at large. Jesus clearly handed the keys to the kingdom over to us, teaching both the disciples and the crowds that followed.

The existence of the present-day church relies on what happened after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus. As Jesus transitioned, the purpose for His followers was to continue spreading His teachings as He journeyed to share the gospel. There was a broader vision that extended beyond Jesus' three years of ministry. The church's establishment aimed to create an assembly and promote purpose. "The ecclesia of God is more than the occasional event of gathering together. Ecclesia is the assembly of the

[3] Peter Goodwin Heltzel, *Resurrection City: A Theology of Improvisation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), 15.

[4] Heltzel, *Resurrection City: A Theology of Improvisation*, 49.

group previously chosen by God which gathers round God as its center."[5] As I reflect on the danger the church (with a big C) faces when there is a lack of focus on the greater vision, integrity in the pursuit of lost souls, and power to transform environments, climates, and situations, I feel a stronger call to service. Can the church ever be unified? Will we ever return to those days that sparked such change, where not only are the spiritually aware fulfilled, but new believers are also nurtured? Not only can those of us who already believe be revived, but we can also increase the church.

The goal is to contribute to the assembly, which is not necessarily institutionalized but rather centered on presence and achieving a new level within humanity. "Assembly expresses the fact that the ecclesia never exists merely as a state institution but only as a result of the consistently renewed event of actually coming together."[6]

To further immerse myself in the ecclesia, I must locate myself. Locating oneself theologically requires insight into the inner workings of the individual and focus. It is evident that many movements have emerged over the years, extending beyond Augustine and Martin Luther. The vast number of groups that have arisen from the days of Paul establishing churches to the present far exceeds what the mind can fathom. Some may be considered schisms, while others might be seen as mere factions of the original movement. For instance, the transition from Pentecostalism to Neo-Pentecostalism, along with the Southern Baptist, National Baptist, American Baptist, and Full Gospel Baptist Fellowship. To properly orient myself within the various movements, I choose to lean on

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[5] Hans Kung*, On Being a Christian* (New York, NY: Collins, 1977), 479.

[6] Kung*, On Being a Christian,* 479.

my foundation within the Baptist church while moving forward to the Neo-Pentecostal/Charismatic movement.

The Baptist Church stems from the separatist movement:

> Modern Baptist churches trace their history to the English Separatist movement in the century after the rise of the original Protestant denominations. This view of Baptist origins has the most historical support and is the most widely accepted. Adherents to this position consider the influence of Anabaptists upon early Baptists to be minimal. It was a time of considerable political and religious turmoil. Both individuals and churches were willing to give up their theological roots if they became convinced that a more biblical "truth" had been discovered.[7]

The search for biblical truth was in the air. It was evident that the inerrancy of the Bible formed a strong foundation for the church. The goal of the movement's founders was to remain faithful to the teachings of the Bible.

The earliest church identified as Baptist was established in 1609, two years before the printing of the King James Version of the Bible, by a separatist named John Smyth in Amsterdam, England. Under his guidance, he initiated a movement that focused on baptizing believing adults rather than infants. This concept, still relevant today, emphasizes the importance of "understanding." One must grasp the process of baptism and be fully immersed in water to be considered a saved believer. Roger Williams was the first to establish the Baptist church in North America in 1638.[8]

There are distinct characteristics in the Baptist church where some flaws have surfaced. The measure of success for the ministry has reached a point where it is directly related to the total number of congregants and the size of the building. The desire for a

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[7] William H. Brackney, *Baptists in North America: An Historical Perspective* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2006), 108.

[8] Brackney, *Baptists in North America*, 124.

higher numerical count has led to a breakdown in ecclesial protocol within some churches; rather than focusing on following God's plan, there is often an emphasis on activities that keep parishioners in the pews. This phenomenon frequently detracts from the congregation's flow because the order or disorder of the church is influenced by the pews instead of being directed by the ecclesial leader. "Although the need to reach more people is commendable we do not achieve meaningful growth by compromising our convictions. The abandonment of theological convictions will devastate the vitality and mission of our churches. The lack of emphasis on doctrine, which is supposed to improve the growth of a church, will in fact result in the ultimate demise of the church."[9]

After the first and second Great Awakenings, the Baptist church experienced significant growth. Since the movement was rooted in knowledge of God and biblical accuracy, it is clear that it would have been a compelling reason to attract new members, as the focus was on enhancing one's understanding. Unfortunately, during this time, many leaders exploited this opportunity to oppress people of color. The catechesis of enslaved individuals into the faith was a prominent aspect of the awakening, which likely contributed to both the increase in church size and the growth of the movement itself.

In contrast to this uniqueness is the Pentecostal movement, which is often characterized by its smaller, spirit-filled congregations. Part of the reasoning behind these smaller congregations stems from a strong desire to have an "encounter" with God. At its inception, the Pentecostal church began with a unified direction and then branched off into many factions, which led to the development of these smaller congregations. Two

[9] R. Stanton Norman, *The Baptist Way: Distinctives of a Baptist Church* (Nashville, TN: B and H Publishing Group, 2005), 22.

sections appeared to have emerged: one following the Trinitarian approach and the other adhering to the Unitarian approach.

The largest and best-known aspect of the Pentecostal movement traces back to William Joseph Seymour and the Azusa Street revivals, while others trace it back to Seymour's teacher, Charles Parham. It is interesting to note that the Baptist movement had few, if any, women in ecclesial leadership, whereas the Pentecostal movement had many women, even in its early stages, who were raised up to leadership roles. A poignant question for the authorities of that time would be: If God did not intend for women to serve successfully and actively in ministry, then why are there denominations that embrace it? The troubling fact behind this question is that it could have been asked centuries ago as well as in the present era. Unfortunately, the patriarchal presence in the church has contributed to the decline and dismantling of women in ministry over the years. Discrimination against women, younger people, and people of color regarding leadership roles within the church and across movements has been an oppressive mechanism that has hindered many.

Similar to the Baptist movement, the Pentecostal movement encourages its members to accept Christ as their Lord and Savior. Pentecostalism, or Classical Pentecostalism, is a renewal movement within Christianity that emphasizes a direct personal experience of God through baptism with the Holy Spirit. The evidence of this baptism is speaking in tongues. However, the more charismatic and neo-Pentecostal perspectives argue that this is just one possible piece of evidence. Therefore, if someone does not speak in tongues, it does not imply that they have not been baptized with the Holy Spirit. "The term *Pentecostal* is derived from Pentecost, the Greek name for the

Jewish Feast of Weeks. For Christians, this event commemorates the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the followers of Jesus Christ, as described in the second chapter of the Book of Acts."[10]

The heart of the Pentecostal movement lay in the charisma that accompanied it; simply put, it was the spirit present within the worship experiences. Spiritual evidence of the Holy Spirit working in people's lives demonstrated that God was their center and that they were part of the kingdom Jesus preached and taught. The followers were often recognized for their modest appearance, yet were filled with the fire of the Holy Spirit. The environment within the Pentecostal church emphasized striving for holiness and drawing as close as possible to the New Testament movement of the faith.

To properly identify myself, it was essential to combine the two previously mentioned movements. My background is rooted in the Baptist church, infused with Pentecostal charisma. Most recently, this has been within the Full Gospel International Fellowship, which seeks to adhere to the entire Bible through protocol, order, biblical training, and education, while remaining true to the principles of a spirit-filled and spirit-led encounter with God. Even before my commitment to the Full Gospel Fellowship, my faith journey has involved a blend of movements. The order of the Baptist church, with its ecclesiastical protocol and autonomy, merges with the evidence of the Holy Spirit. Many of the apostolic affirmations and spiritual gifts are expressed within the fellowship.

It is interesting to observe how Christian denominations have evolved and how the current structure of the church is influenced by its historical context. I believe in full immersion baptism by water as well as in the baptism of the Holy Spirit. I believe that

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[10] Allan Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism: Global Charismatic Christianity* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 49.

God has given everyone spiritual gifts that must be affirmed and confirmed before embarking on ministry. The spiritual discernment required for leadership must be identified and developed. This encounter with God equips you for service in the kingdom. There are many active movements within Christendom today, as well as numerous previous movements that are either dormant or on life support. The Full Gospel Fellowship is a recent movement that has emerged in the last two decades. Whether under this fellowship or not, I believe that anyone who walks with God must lead a Spirit-led and Spirit-filled life. I am not rigidly attached to any convictions regarding movements except for one: people must walk and serve with a mindset focused on lifting oppression and making God's presence and service available to all, regardless of culture, color, gender, age, or class. I believe we share one faith, and these various movements throughout history have shaped every denomination, not just isolated ones.

I desire to disband any notion of patriarchy and matriarchy within religion. The goal is to see God. God does not have a gender, color, or class. We often focus on Jesus, who possessed all the above; however, he was only one person within the Godhead. It is also important to note that I am a Trinitarian, believing in God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Although these are my convictions, they do not negate the beliefs of others. The important aspect of these movements over the years is often their desire to be the most accurate interpretation of the church that Jesus and even Paul called for. However, when we decide to step back and evaluate the situation, we all have aspects of the faith that are accurate. To lift oppression in the world through God's guidance, it is of utmost importance to commit to the following task: operate in unity and watch God work. My personal life and my place in the body of Christ have changed after studying church

history; this journey has helped me situate myself within history as well as evaluate those aspects that are truly important.

Missional Theology

Missional Theology heavily focuses on Christian identity. It involves understanding how Christians are formed and the spiritual journey they undergo when they choose to believe, particularly regarding how the church practices disciple-making. This topic encompasses several areas: hospitality, community, vocation, liberation, discipleship, and salvation. The shift in the approach to developing Christians is primarily due to the larger community and moral compass no longer producing Christians organically, resulting from conflicting ethical systems. This theological perspective aims to reflect God's presence on earth. There are an insurmountable number of ways to identify God's reflection, but it tends to lean toward God's nature. This concept encompasses God's love and connection with humanity.

Missional Theology encompasses much of what is needed to establish a church, including its goals, mission, vision, and means for carrying out ministry at large. Without a solid Missional Theology foundation, a church may struggle and operate from a significant deficit in its ability to create disciples and provide ongoing support for their lives. It addresses the overall needs of the people: physiological, spiritual, and emotional. Furthermore, it is a subset of ecclesiology. In ecclesiology, the overall structure of the church is studied, including its governing and doctrinal frameworks.[11]

[11] Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit: A Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 158.

Missional Theology, a dynamic area within contemporary theological discourse, seeks to define the nature and mission of the Church in relation to the world. This theological framework arises from a blend of biblical exegesis, historical theology, and practical ecclesiology, offering a nuanced understanding of the Church's role in God's redemptive plan. The importance of Missional Theology lies not only in its ability to inform ecclesiastical practices but also in its potential to transform the Church's identity in an increasingly complex and secular society. The topics examined include historical roots, key theological concepts, and practical implications for contemporary ecclesial life. These elements not only address the needs of the Church but also respond to the wider societal challenges of the present era.

Historical Context of Missional Theology

To understand the current discourse surrounding Missional Theology, it is crucial to explore its historical roots. The origins of missional thought can be traced back to the early Church, where the call to evangelize was deeply embedded in the apostolic mission. The Reformation period sparked a renewed focus on the Church's mission, as reformers like Martin Luther and John Calvin aimed to reclaim the centrality of scripture and the priesthood of all believers. Their emphasis on individual faith and the availability of the scriptures established the foundation for a more personal and communal understanding of mission. In the twentieth century, Missional Theology gained momentum as a response to the challenges posed by modernity and postmodernity.[12]

[12] Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, 174.

The emergence of missiological studies, particularly through the works of scholars such as David Bosch and Lesslie Newbigin, has facilitated a critical engagement with the cultural contexts in which the Church operates. Bosch's seminal work, *Transforming Mission*, posits that mission is not merely an activity of the Church but rather an integral aspect of God's nature, thereby framing the Church's mission as participation in the divine mission (missio Dei).[13] This theological shift underscores the necessity for the Church to engage with the world in a manner that is both contextual and transformative. The insights of these scholars have encouraged the Church to rethink its approach to mission, moving away from a colonial mindset toward one that values partnership and mutual respect with diverse cultures. “Grounded in Scripture, the apostolic act constitutes the being of the community. If the community fails to live her life of missionary service, which is the nature of her fellowship with God, then she does not live in the Spirit and cannot be Jesus Christ’s community.”[14]

The Reformation, which commenced in the sixteenth century, was a significant turning point in the development of Missional Theology. Figures like Martin Luther and John Calvin emphasized the authority of scripture and the priesthood of all believers, which collectively contributed to a renewed understanding of the church's mission.[15] The Reformation's focus on individual autonomy and the direct relationship between the believer and God sparked a change in how the mission was perceived.

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[13] John G. Flett, *The Witness of God: The Trinity, Missio Dei, Karl Barth, and the Nature of Christian Community* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 85.

[14] Flett, *The Witness of God*, 266.

[15] Samuel Escobar, *The New Global Mission: The Gospel from Everywhere to Everyone* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 132.

The church was no longer viewed merely as a hierarchical institution but as a community of believers charged with proclaiming the Gospel. Furthermore, the missionary efforts during the Reformation period, particularly through the work of the Moravians and later the Puritans, showcased a growing recognition of the necessity for global evangelization[16]. The establishment of missions to the Americas and beyond highlighted a rising belief that the church's mission extended beyond local congregations to include a global vision. However, this expansion was not without its complications, as it frequently intertwined with colonialism and cultural imposition, raising significant ethical questions that continue to challenge Missional Theology today.[17]

In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, Missional Theology has experienced a profound transformation influenced by postmodern thought and renewed emphasis on cultural engagement. The emergence of the missional church movement, led by figures like Alan Hirsch and Michael Frost, aims to redefine the church's mission within a rapidly changing cultural landscape. This movement stresses the importance of being "sent" into the world, advocating for a paradigm shift from a church-centric model to one that prioritizes the church's role in society. Furthermore, contemporary Missional Theology tackles issues of social justice, environmental stewardship, and interfaith dialogue, demonstrating a nuanced understanding of the complexities of modern life. The incorporation of these themes into missional discourse highlights the need for a holistic approach to mission that goes beyond mere evangelism to include the broader

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[16] Samuel Escobar, *The New Global Mission: The Gospel from Everywhere to Everyone* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 137.

[17] Darrell L. Guder, *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 44.

implications of the Gospel for societal transformation. As a result, Missional Theology today is marked by a commitment to contextualization, cultural sensitivity, and a recognition of the church's role as a transformative agent in the world.[18]

From its early roots in the apostolic church to its contemporary expressions, Missional Theology has consistently wrestled with the implications of the Gospel for various cultures and contexts. As the church continues to navigate the complexities of modernity, the insights gained from the historical trajectory of Missional Theology remain profoundly relevant, providing a framework for understanding the church's mission in an increasingly pluralistic and interconnected world. The ongoing dialogue surrounding Missional Theology not only enriches the church's understanding of its role but also encourages a deeper engagement with the pressing issues of our time, thereby affirming the lasting significance of the missional imperative.

Theological Foundations of Missional Theology

Missional Theology represents a significant area of inquiry within contemporary Christian thought, particularly as it pertains to the church's role in the world. This exploration is not merely an academic exercise; rather, it is a profound engagement with the implications of the Christian faith in a pluralistic society. Missional Theology is significant because it can synthesize various theological perspectives, including ecclesiology, soteriology, and eschatology, thereby providing a comprehensive framework for understanding the church's mission.

[18] Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, 95.

The biblical foundations of Missional Theology are manifold, drawing from both the Old and New Testaments. In the Old Testament, the covenantal relationship between God and Israel precedes the missional mandate.

The call of Abraham, for example, is not just a personal invitation but a divine commission to be a blessing to all nations (Gn. 12:1-3). This theme of blessing and inclusion is further developed in the prophetic literature, where the vision of a restored creation encompasses all peoples and nations (Is. 49:6). In the New Testament, the missional imperative is established in the Great Commission (Mt. 28:18-20), where Jesus commands His disciples to make disciples of all nations. This directive highlights the universal scope of the church's mission and the necessity of engaging with diverse cultures.[19]

The Great Commission serves as a foundational text, emphasizing the necessity of making disciples of all nations. The purpose of the Great Commission wasn't just to share the news of Jesus' resurrection but to create believers and followers of his teachings. This concept speaks to transformed lives and mindsets. It was a means to further express the need to shift perceptions and embrace a new way.[20] This directive not only highlights the Church's responsibility to spread the Gospel but also underscores the universal scope of its mission, transcending geographical and cultural boundaries. Furthermore, the early church's expansion, as chronicled in the Book of Acts, exemplifies the practical outworking of Missional Theology, where the apostles actively sought to proclaim the Gospel in various cultural contexts. Darrell Guder's *Called to Witness:*

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[19] George R. Hunsberger, *The Story That Chooses Us: A Tapestry of Missional Vision* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015), 196.

[20] Hunsberger, *The Story That Chooses Us*, 200.

Doing Missional Theology provides a New Testament perspective on Missional Theology.[21] What was Christ's mission, and how did he carry it out? It is a text aimed at bridging the divide between mission and theology. If there is a study of God, then there should be an aim to understand God's mission and how it affects humanity internally and interpersonally.[22]

At the core of Missional Theology is a series of theological constructs that shape its understanding of the Church's mission. Central to this discussion is the concept of the missio Dei, which suggests that God's mission encompasses all of creation and is not limited to the activities of the Church. This perspective calls for a re-evaluation of the Church's role as a participant in God's redemptive work, rather than merely as the sole agent of mission. Consequently, the Church is called to embody the values of the Kingdom of God, engaging in acts of justice, mercy, and reconciliation.[23] This understanding encourages believers to view their everyday lives as arenas for mission, where they can reflect God's love and justice within their communities. Furthermore, Missional Theology emphasizes the significance of community and relationality in the pursuit of mission.

The Church is seen as a covenant community, called to reflect God's character in its interactions with the world. This communal aspect is especially significant in a postmodern context, where individualism often weakens the collective witness of the Church. The prevailing culture of individualism has made it increasingly difficult to

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[21] Escobar, *The New Global Mission*, 161.

[22] Guder, *Called to Witness*, 210.

[23] Hunsberger, *The Story That Chooses Us*, 193.

create, engage, and develop disciples; the missing element in this argument is the importance of relationships, which was the original purpose of becoming a Christian.[24]

By fostering authentic relationships and embodying the love of Christ, the Church can effectively engage with its surrounding culture, thereby fulfilling its missional mandate. The relational dimension of mission also emphasizes the importance of listening to and learning from the communities in which the Church operates, ensuring that its mission is both relevant and respectful.[25] Communities and subgroups are centered around gender, age, and socioeconomic background. The local church can choose a focus group that may prioritize one group over another, but ultimately, the Church has a responsibility to all groups and all ages. Gaps in this grouping can create significant deficits in the local church and, eventually, in the Universal Church.

The implications of Missional Theology are profound, particularly regarding the nature of the church and its mission. Firstly, Missional Theology posits that the church's identity is intrinsically linked to its mission; therefore, the church cannot fulfill its purpose without actively engaging in the world. This understanding requires a re-evaluation of ecclesiastical practices, encouraging congregations to adopt a stance of openness and involvement with their surrounding communities. Moreover, Missional Theology promotes a nuanced understanding of cultural engagement. It challenges the dichotomy between sacred and secular, advocating for a holistic approach that recognizes God's sovereignty over all facets of life. Consequently, the church is called to be a

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[24] Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 174.

[25] Craig Van Gelder, *The Missional Church in Context: Helping Congregations Develop Contextual Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 188.

transformative presence in society, addressing social injustices and speaking up for the marginalized. This engagement is not merely a matter of social action; rather, it is an expression of the gospel's transformative power in the world.[26]

The theological foundations of Missional Theology provide a rich and nuanced framework for understanding the church's role in the world. By emphasizing the Missio Dei and the church's identity as a sent community, Missional Theology challenges traditional ecclesiastical paradigms and promotes a more engaged and transformative approach to cultural interaction. While there are challenges inherent in this paradigm, the potential for the church to embody the gospel in diverse contexts remains a compelling vision for contemporary Christian practice. Ultimately, the implications of Missional Theology extend beyond mere academic discourse; they call the church to profound and active participation in God's redemptive work in the world.[27]

Key Concepts in Missional Theology

Several key concepts underpin the framework of Missional Theology, each contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the Church's mission. One such concept is contextualization, which refers to translating the Gospel message into the cultural idioms and practices of a given community.

Contextualization is not merely a matter of linguistic translation; it involves deep engagement with the cultural narratives, values, and worldviews that shape a community's understanding of reality. This approach requires a nuanced understanding of

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[26] Van Gelder, *The Missional Church in Context*, 208.

[27] Wright, *The Mission of God*, 73.

the interplay between the Gospel and culture, enabling a faithful yet relevant proclamation of Christ's message. It also encourages the Church to be adaptable, acknowledging that the expression of faith may vary across different cultural contexts. In addition to contextualization, the concept of holistic mission is paramount within Missional Theology. Holistic mission encompasses both evangelism and social action, recognizing that the Gospel addresses not only spiritual needs but also the physical, emotional, and social dimensions of human existence. This integrated approach confronts the dichotomy often found in traditional ecclesial practices, where evangelism is viewed as separate from social justice initiatives.[28]

By embracing a comprehensive understanding of its mission, the Church can more effectively respond to the complexities of human suffering and injustice, thereby embodying the transformative power of the Gospel in tangible ways. This comprehensive perspective also encourages the Church to work alongside other organizations and movements that aim to tackle systemic issues, promoting a spirit of unity and shared purpose.

Practical Implications of Missional Theology

The implications of Missional Theology extend beyond individual believers to the collective identity of the church. Exploring its ecclesiological dimensions reveals how this framework reshapes our understanding of community, leadership, and worship. By examining these aspects, we can better appreciate how Missional Theology informs the church's structure and function in a rapidly changing world.

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[28] Kirsteen Kim, *Joining in with the Spirit: Connecting World Church and Local Mission* (London, UK: SCM Press, 2010), 228.

Community and Belonging

Missional Theology redefines the concept of community within the church. It suggests that belonging is not merely about membership but rather about participating in God's mission. This perspective nurtures a sense of shared purpose among congregants, prompting them to engage in mission together. Additionally, it challenges the church to be inclusive, reaching out to marginalized groups and cultivating a diverse community that reflects the kingdom of God. This inclusivity not only enriches the church's witness but also represents the love of Christ in action, illustrating that the gospel is for everyone, regardless of their background or circumstances.[29]

Leadership and Empowerment

The implications of Missional Theology also extend to leadership within the church. Traditional leadership models often emphasize authority and control; however, a missional approach advocates for servant leadership that empowers others to engage in God's mission. This paradigm shift requires the development of leaders who are not only theologically knowledgeable but also culturally aware and socially involved. Such leaders are called to mentor and equip others, fostering a culture of collaboration and shared responsibility within the church community. This empowerment invites all members to discover and utilize their unique gifts and talents in service to the mission.[30]

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[29] Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 64.

[30] Van Gelder, *The Missional Church in Context*, 252.

Worship as Mission

Additionally, Missional Theology reinterprets worship's role within the church. Worship is not solely an inward-focused activity; rather, it is understood as a missional act that sends believers into the world. This viewpoint encourages the church to cultivate worship practices that inspire and equip congregants for mission, thus reinforcing the connection between worship and everyday life. By incorporating mission elements into worship services, such as community prayers, outreach testimonies, and service opportunities, the church can foster an environment that promotes a missional mindset among its members.[31]

Practical Applications of Missional Theology

The practical implications of Missional Theology manifest in various aspects of church life and ministry. This section will explore how this theological framework can be applied in areas such as evangelism, community engagement, and discipleship. By examining these applications, we can see how Missional Theology translates into actionable steps for the church.

Evangelism in a Missional Context

In a missional context, evangelism is redefined as a relational and holistic endeavor. Instead of viewing evangelism as a series of events or programs, it is understood as a lifestyle that reflects the love of Christ in everyday interactions. This approach emphasizes the importance of building authentic relationships with individuals

[31] Van Gelder, *The Missional Church in Context*, 275.

in the community, thereby creating opportunities for meaningful conversations about faith. By prioritizing relationships over mere conversions, the church can cultivate an environment where individuals feel valued and heard, paving the way for deeper spiritual discussions.[32]

Community Engagement and Social Justice

Furthermore, Missional Theology calls for active engagement in social justice initiatives. The church is challenged to address systemic issues such as poverty, inequality, and injustice, recognizing that these concerns are integral to the mission of God. Practical applications may include forming partnerships with local organizations, advocating for marginalized populations, and implementing service projects that address the community's needs. By actively participating in social justice efforts, the church fulfills its mission while demonstrating the transformative power of the gospel in confronting real-world issues.[33]

Discipleship as a Missional Endeavor

Discipleship is also reimagined within the framework of Missional Theology. Instead of concentrating solely on personal spiritual growth, discipleship is viewed as equipping believers to engage in God's mission. This entails fostering a culture of mentorship and accountability, where individuals are encouraged to express their faith in

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[32] Gelder, *The Missional Church in Context*, 281.

[33] Alan J. Roxburgh, *Missional: Joining God in the Neighborhood* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 166.

tangible ways. Practical applications may include small group studies that highlight mission, training programs for lay leaders, and chances for short-term mission trips. By integrating mission into the discipleship process, the church can nurture a generation of believers who are not only informed about their faith but also actively involved in living it out.[34]

The implications of Missional Theology for contemporary ecclesial practice are profound and far-reaching. As the Church grapples with the realities of a post-Christian society, it must adopt a posture of humility and openness, recognizing that its mission is not to impose its beliefs but to engage in meaningful dialogue with the surrounding culture. This requires a commitment to listening and learning from others, as well as a willingness to adapt and innovate in response to society's changing landscape.[35]

Such an approach enriches the Church's understanding of its mission and fosters a spirit of collaboration and partnership with diverse communities. Furthermore, Missional Theology calls for the re-evaluation of ecclesial structures and practices. Traditional models of church growth, which often prioritize numerical expansion and institutional maintenance, may need to be reimagined within a missional framework. This shift requires a focus on discipleship and spiritual formation, equipping believers to live out their faith in all aspects of life. By cultivating a culture of mission within the Church, congregations can empower individuals to engage in acts of service and witness within their communities, thus fulfilling their missional calling. This empowerment can take

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[34] Roxburgh, *Missional*, 170.

[35] Robert J. Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985), 77.

various forms, such as community service projects, advocacy for social justice, and establishing partnerships with local organizations that address urgent societal needs.

Challenges and Critiques of Missional Theology

Despite its many strengths, Missional Theology is not without its challenges and critiques. One significant concern revolves around the potential for cultural imperialism, where the Church's engagement with culture may inadvertently lead to the imposition of Western values and practices on non-Western contexts. This critique highlights the necessity of a critical, reflective approach to contextualization, ensuring that the Gospel is communicated in ways that respect and honor the cultural integrity of diverse communities. It emphasizes the importance of understanding power dynamics and fostering equity in cross-cultural interactions.[36]

Moreover, an emphasis on mission can sometimes lead to neglecting the Church's internal life and spiritual health. In the pursuit of external engagement, there is a risk that the Church might overlook the importance of nurturing its members and fostering a vibrant community of faith. Consequently, a balanced approach is essential—one that prioritizes both the inward and outward dimensions of the Church's life. This balance can be achieved through intentional practices of worship, fellowship, and spiritual formation that cultivate a deep sense of community and belonging among believers, equipping them to engage in mission from a position of strength and vitality.[37]

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[36] Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st-Century Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2003), 276.

[37] Guder, *Missional Church*, 115.

Conclusion

In summary, Missional Theology represents a significant development within contemporary theological discourse, offering a comprehensive framework for understanding the Church's mission in relation to the world. By exploring its historical roots, theological foundations, and practical implications, this essay has sought to illuminate the multifaceted nature of Missional Theology. As the Church navigates the complexities of a rapidly changing cultural landscape, it is imperative that it embraces its missional identity, engaging in acts of love, justice, and reconciliation. Ultimately, the call to mission is not merely an obligation but a profound invitation to participate in God's redemptive work, reflecting the character of Christ in a world in desperate need of hope and transformation. By committing to this mission, the Church can become a beacon of light and hope, demonstrating the transformative power of the Gospel in every corner of society.

Young adults are often thrust into service without a clear understanding of their purpose and the reasons behind their actions. Unfortunately, this has led many to struggle with self-identity, resulting in a lack of purpose and drive for existence. While there are many who are highly driven and passionate, there are just as many who feel lost and need guidance. Missional Theology addresses these concerns and serves as a valuable tool for the advancement of young adults, creating a cyclical impact on their church, community, and the world at large.

CHAPTER FIVE

INTERDISCIPLINARY FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

The most common understanding of leadership in popular culture is that it largely involves a specific role; it comes with a title, and others are expected to report to that leader. Northouse suggests that leadership is more of a process rather than a final destination.

In contemporary discourse surrounding leadership, particularly within the realms of organizational behavior and educational theory, transformational leadership has emerged as a pivotal framework. This writing seeks to explore the multifaceted dimensions of Missional Theology and its implications for developing robust young adult discipleship programs. By examining its theoretical underpinnings, practical applications, and significance in fostering sustainable organizational cultures, this analysis will clarify the profound impact of effective leadership on individuals and communities.

The Core Components of Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership is often divided into four essential components, commonly referred to as the "Four I's": Idealized Influence, Inspirational Motivation, Intellectual Stimulation, and Individualized Consideration. Each component plays a

crucial role in shaping the transformational leader's ability to engage and elevate followers.[1]

The Idealized Influence component refers to the leader's ability to serve as a role model for followers. Transformational leaders exhibit behaviors that inspire admiration, respect, and trust. They demonstrate ethical standards and a strong sense of purpose, which encourages followers to emulate their actions and values. By embodying the principles they advocate, transformational leaders create a strong moral foundation that guides the behavior of their team members.[2]

Inspirational Motivation is when transformational leaders articulate a compelling vision of the future that inspires and motivates followers. They communicate high expectations and provide meaning and challenge to their followers' work. This component is crucial as it fosters a sense of purpose and belonging among team members, encouraging them to strive for excellence and engage fully in their tasks. By instilling enthusiasm and optimism, leaders can galvanize their teams toward achieving shared goals. Idealized influence is a cornerstone of transformational leadership, encapsulating the leader's ability to act as a role model for their followers. Leaders who exhibit idealized influence are often seen as charismatic and trustworthy, which fosters a strong emotional connection with their team members. This connection is built on the leader's ability to demonstrate ethical behavior, integrity, and a commitment to the organization's values.

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[1] James MacGregor Burns, *Leadership* (London, UK: Harper & Row, 1978).

[2] BD Gonfa, "Review on Components of Transformational Leadership," *Arabian Journal of Business and Management Review* 9 (2019): 382.

When leaders embody these qualities, they inspire followers to emulate their behaviors and adopt similar values, creating a cohesive organizational culture. Furthermore, idealized influence enhances the leader's credibility, allowing them to effectively guide their followers through challenges and uncertainties. The impact of idealized influence can be profound, as it not only shapes individual behaviors but also influences the overall morale and motivation within the team. Inspirational motivation is another critical element of transformational leadership, focusing on the leader's ability to articulate a compelling vision that inspires and energizes followers. Leaders who excel in this area are skilled communicators, capable of painting a vivid picture of the future that resonates with their team's aspirations and values. This vision serves as a guiding beacon, instilling a sense of purpose and direction among followers. By fostering an environment where team members feel connected to a larger mission, leaders can enhance commitment and engagement. Inspirational motivation also involves the use of positive reinforcement and encouragement, which can significantly boost followers' confidence and drive. When team members believe in the vision and feel motivated to contribute to its realization, they are more likely to go above and beyond in their roles, leading to increased productivity and innovation.[3]

Intellectual Stimulation is when transformational leaders encourage creativity and innovation by challenging the status quo and inviting followers to think critically and explore new ideas. They create an environment where questioning assumptions is welcomed, and mistakes are viewed as opportunities for learning rather than failures. This component is vital in fostering a culture of continuous improvement and

[3] Gonfa, “Review on Components of Transformational Leadership,” 383.

adaptability, which is essential in today's rapidly changing organizational landscapes. Intellectual stimulation is a vital aspect of transformational leadership that encourages followers to think critically and creatively. Leaders who promote intellectual stimulation challenge the status quo and encourage their team members to question assumptions, explore new ideas, and engage in problem-solving. This approach not only fosters a culture of innovation but also empowers followers to take ownership of their work and contribute to the organization's success. By creating an environment that values experimentation and risk-taking, leaders can unlock the full potential of their team members. Additionally, intellectual stimulation helps to develop followers' skills and competencies, preparing them for future leadership roles. This emphasis on continuous learning and growth is essential for organizations seeking to adapt to rapidly changing environments and maintain a competitive edge.[4]

Individualized Consideration is when an aspect emphasizes the importance of recognizing and addressing the unique needs and aspirations of each follower. Transformational leaders take the time to mentor and coach their team members, providing personalized support and encouragement. By fostering strong, individualized relationships, leaders can enhance followers' self-esteem and commitment, ultimately leading to higher levels of performance and satisfaction. Individualized consideration is the final component of transformational leadership, highlighting the importance of recognizing and addressing the unique needs and aspirations of each follower. Leaders who practice individualized consideration take the time to understand their team members' strengths, weaknesses, and personal goals. This personalized approach fosters a

[4] Gonfa, "Review on Components of Transformational Leadership," 384.

supportive environment where followers feel valued and understood, leading to increased job satisfaction and loyalty. By providing tailored mentorship and coaching, leaders can help their followers develop their skills and achieve their professional objectives. Furthermore, individualized consideration promotes diversity and inclusion within teams, as leaders are more likely to appreciate the varied perspectives and contributions of each member. This not only enhances team dynamics but also drives innovation by leveraging the diverse talents and experiences of the workforce.[5]

The Impact of Transformational Leadership on Organizational Culture

Transformational leadership has a profound impact on organizational culture, shaping the values, beliefs, and behaviors that define an organization. By promoting a culture of trust, collaboration, and innovation, transformational leaders can create an environment where employees feel valued and motivated to contribute their best efforts. This cultural shift often results in increased employee engagement, higher job satisfaction, and lower turnover rates.

Moreover, organizations led by transformational leaders are more likely to embrace change and adapt to new challenges. The emphasis on intellectual stimulation encourages a proactive approach to problem-solving, allowing teams to navigate complexities with agility and resilience. As a result, these organizations are often better

[5] James MacGregor Burns, *Transforming Leadership: A New Pursuit of Happiness* (New York, NY: Grove Press, 2004), 264.

positioned to capitalize on emerging opportunities and maintain a competitive edge in their respective industries.[6]

Challenges and Criticisms of Transformational Leadership

Despite its numerous advantages, transformational leadership has its challenges and critiques. A major concern is the risk of dependency on the leader. In highly transformational settings, followers might become excessively reliant on their leaders for guidance and motivation, potentially stifling individual initiative and creativity. This dependency can result in a lack of autonomy and a reduced sense of ownership over one's work.[7]

Additionally, the charismatic nature of transformational leaders can sometimes overshadow the contributions of team members, leading to an imbalance in recognition and reward. This can create feelings of resentment among followers who may feel undervalued or overlooked. Furthermore, if a transformational leader's vision is not aligned with the organization's goals or values, it can result in confusion and disillusionment among team members.

The effectiveness of transformational leadership can vary significantly based on the context and the specific needs of the organization. What works in one setting may not be as effective in another, highlighting the importance of adaptability and situational awareness in leadership practices.[8]

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[6] Bernard M. Bass, *Leadership and Performance Beyond Expectations* (London, UK: Free Press, 1985), 148.

[7] Peter G. Northouse, *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, 9th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2021), 80.

[8] John P. Kotter, *Leading Change* (London, UK: Harvard Business Review Press, 2012), 93.

Transformational leadership represents a dynamic and influential approach to guiding individuals and organizations toward achieving their fullest potential. By focusing on the relational aspects of leadership and fostering an environment of trust, inspiration, and innovation, transformational leaders can drive meaningful change and cultivate a culture of excellence. However, it is essential for leaders to remain aware of the potential challenges and criticisms associated with this style to ensure they balance their influence with the empowerment of their followers. Ultimately, the success of transformational leadership lies in its ability to adapt to the unique needs of the organization and its people, creating a sustainable path toward growth and achievement.[9]

Integrating the Components

The integration of idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration creates a strong framework for transformational leadership. When leaders effectively combine these elements, they can develop a high-performing team that is not only motivated and engaged but also resilient in the face of challenges. This comprehensive approach to leadership nurtures a culture of trust, collaboration, and continuous improvement, ultimately driving organizational success. As the business landscape continues to evolve, the principles of transformational leadership remain relevant, offering a roadmap for leaders who aim to inspire and empower their followers in pursuit of shared goals.[10]

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[9] Northouse, *Leadership*, 99.

[10] Gonfa, "Review on Components of Transformational Leadership," 390.

The Essence of Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership is characterized by a focus on inspiring and motivating followers to surpass their self-interests for the collective good. This form of leadership is not merely about directing or managing; it entails a profound commitment to the personal and professional development of team members. Transformational leaders are often regarded as visionaries who articulate a compelling vision for the future, subsequently instilling a sense of purpose and direction within their teams.[11] They engage in active listening, offer personalized support, and nurture an environment where creativity and innovation can thrive. This approach aligns seamlessly with the principles of Missional Theology, which promotes a community-oriented mindset that emphasizes relationships and shared goals.

Missional Theology: A Framework for Community Engagement

Missional Theology is based on the belief that the church's primary purpose is to engage in God's mission in the world. This perspective shifts the focus from a solely inward-looking church to one that actively interacts with the surrounding community. It highlights the importance of building relationships that demonstrate the love and grace of God, encouraging believers to express their faith in concrete ways. In this context, transformational leadership is vital for equipping individuals to participate in missional activities. Leaders who embody transformational qualities can motivate their followers to accept their roles as agents of change, nurturing a sense of belonging and purpose within the community.

[11] Northouse, *Leadership*, 108.

The Role of Relationships in Leadership

At the core of both transformational leadership and Missional Theology lies the concept of relationships. Effective leaders recognize that their influence goes beyond mere authority; it is rooted in trust, respect, and genuine connection with their followers. This relational dynamic is crucial for fostering a culture of discipleship, especially among young adults who often seek authentic connections and meaningful engagement. Transformational leaders focus on building relationships by dedicating time and energy to understanding each individual's unique strengths, challenges, and aspirations. This personalized approach not only promotes individual growth but also reinforces the overall cohesion of the community.[12]

Fostering a Culture of Discipleship

In the context of transformational leadership and Missional Theology, fostering a culture of discipleship involves creating an environment where individuals feel empowered to explore their faith and develop their spiritual gifts. Transformational leaders can facilitate this process by providing opportunities for mentorship, collaboration, and shared learning experiences. By encouraging young adults to take ownership of their spiritual journeys, leaders can cultivate a sense of agency and responsibility within the community. This approach aligns with the missional call to be active participants in God's work, inspiring individuals to use their unique gifts and talents to serve others and advance the church's mission.

[12] Northouse, *Leadership*, 180.

Challenges and Opportunities

While the integration of transformational leadership and Missional Theology presents numerous opportunities for growth and engagement, it is not without its challenges. Leaders may encounter resistance from individuals who are hesitant to embrace change or who feel disconnected from the community's mission.[13] Additionally, the fast-paced nature of modern life can make it difficult for individuals to prioritize relational engagement. However, these challenges also present opportunities for transformational leaders to demonstrate resilience and adaptability. By actively listening to concerns, addressing barriers to participation, and fostering an inclusive environment, leaders can navigate these challenges and inspire a renewed commitment to the shared mission.

A Synergistic Relationship

The intersection of transformational leadership and Missional Theology highlights the importance of relational dynamics in fostering a vibrant community of faith.[14] By prioritizing relationships, empowering individuals, and cultivating a culture of discipleship, transformational leaders can effectively engage young adults in the mission of the church. This synergistic relationship not only enhances individual growth but also strengthens the collective impact of the community, ultimately advancing the mission of God in the world. As leaders continue to embrace these principles, they will be better

[13] Northouse, *Leadership*, 172.

[14] David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, 20th Anniversary ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011), 61.

equipped to navigate the complexities of modern ministry and inspire a new generation of believers to live out their faith in meaningful ways.[15]

Understanding Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership is a style that emphasizes inspiring and motivating followers to reach their full potential. In the context of young adult discipleship programs, this leadership approach is especially effective because it aligns with the developmental needs of young adults, who are often in a phase of exploration and identity formation. Transformational leaders are known for their ability to connect with individuals on a personal level, creating an environment of trust and openness. This connection is vital in discipleship, as it encourages young adults to share their thoughts, doubts, and experiences related to their faith journey.[16]

Creating a Relationship-Centric Framework

At the core of an effective young adult discipleship program lies a framework that emphasizes relationship-building. This encompasses not only the relationships between leaders and participants but also those among the participants themselves.[17] By fostering a sense of community, leaders can establish a safe space where young adults feel valued and heard. This can be accomplished through small group discussions, mentorship opportunities, and social events that promote interaction and bonding. When young adults

[15] Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 65.

[16] Northouse, *Leadership*, 195.

[17] Van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church*, 43.

feel connected to one another, they are more likely to engage deeply with the program and their faith.

Encouraging Personal Development

Personal development plays a vital role in discipleship, enabling young adults to deepen their understanding of themselves and their faith. Leaders can support this growth by offering opportunities for self-reflection, goal setting, and skill development. Workshops covering topics such as effective communication, conflict resolution, and spiritual disciplines can empower young adults to take charge of their faith journey. Furthermore, integrating experiential learning elements, such as service projects or mission trips, allows participants to apply their learning in real-world scenarios, further enhancing their personal growth and spiritual maturity.[18]

Fostering Leadership Skills

One key outcome of a successful young adult discipleship program is developing future leaders within the church and community. Leaders should intentionally incorporate leadership training into the program, equipping young adults with the skills necessary to step into leadership roles. This can include offering opportunities for young adults to lead discussions, organize events, or mentor younger participants. By assigning them real responsibilities, leaders can help young adults build confidence in their abilities and understand the importance of servant leadership, a foundational principle in many faith traditions.

[18] Van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church*, 65.

Engaging in Meaningful Service

Serving others is a crucial element of discipleship that not only benefits the community but also enhances the spiritual lives of young adults. By involving participants in service projects, leaders can help them appreciate the importance of putting their faith into action. This could include local outreach initiatives, such as volunteering at food banks or joining community clean-up days, as well as global missions that expose young adults to diverse cultures and needs. Such experiences can deepen their faith and commitment to serving others, emphasizing that discipleship is not just about personal growth but also about creating a positive impact in the world.[19]

Strengthening the Community

As young adults grow in their faith and develop leadership skills, they strengthen the overall community. A well-structured discipleship program can create a ripple effect, wherein empowered young adults inspire others to engage in their faith and assume leadership roles. This not only revitalizes congregations but also cultivates a culture of mentorship and support, with older generations investing in the younger ones. By nurturing a strong community of disciples, churches can ensure that their mission and values are transmitted, creating a sustainable model for future generations.

Building young adult discipleship programs that incorporate transformational leadership principles is essential for fostering a vibrant and engaged community of faith. By prioritizing relationship-building, personal development, leadership training, and meaningful service, leaders can create an environment that empowers young adults to

[19] Van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church*, 80.

explore their faith and take on active roles within their congregations. This holistic approach enhances individual growth and strengthens the church as a whole, ensuring that young adults are equipped to lead and serve in a rapidly changing world.[20]

Practical Applications of Transformational Leadership in Educational Settings

Transformational leadership is often used in educational institutions to enhance organizational culture and promote staff sustainability. In this context, leaders are responsible for creating an environment that encourages collaboration, innovation, and continuous improvement. By nurturing a culture of trust and respect, transformational leaders can empower educators to take ownership of their professional development and contribute to a positive school climate. Additionally, applying transformational leadership principles can lead to better student outcomes, as engaged and motivated educators are more likely to inspire their students to achieve academic success.[21]

Creating a Collaborative Environment

One of the core tenets of transformational leadership is the focus on collaboration among staff members. In educational settings, this can be seen in the creation of professional learning communities (PLCs) where teachers gather to exchange best practices, address challenges, and develop innovative teaching strategies. By promoting collaboration, transformational leaders help dismantle the silos that often exist within schools, fostering a sense of community and shared purpose. This collaborative

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[20] Van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church*, 92.

[21] Margaret Grogan, *The Jossey-Bass Reader on Educational Leadership* (London, UK: Wiley, 2013), 32.

atmosphere not only boosts teacher morale but also encourages the sharing of diverse perspectives, ultimately enriching the educational experience for students.

Encouraging Innovation and Creativity

Transformational leaders in education actively foster a culture of innovation and creativity. They motivate educators to experiment with new teaching methods, integrate technology into the classroom, and explore interdisciplinary approaches to learning. For example, a transformational leader may support a teacher's initiative to implement project-based learning, where students engage in hands-on projects that require critical thinking and problem-solving skills. By providing essential resources and support, transformational leaders empower educators to take risks and innovate, leading to more engaging and effective learning experiences for students.[22]

Fostering Professional Development

Professional development is a crucial aspect of transformational leadership in educational settings. Transformational leaders prioritize ongoing training and development opportunities for their staff, recognizing that continuous learning is vital for both personal and professional growth. This can include workshops, mentorship programs, and access to online courses that align with teachers' interests and the school's objectives. By investing in their educators, transformational leaders not only enhance their staff's skills and knowledge but also show a commitment to their professional journeys, which can lead to increased job satisfaction and retention rates.

[22] Northouse, *Leadership*, 141.

Building Trust and Respect

Trust and respect are foundational elements of transformational leadership. Leaders who cultivate these qualities create an environment where educators feel valued and supported. This can be accomplished through open communication, active listening, and constructive feedback. For instance, a transformational leader might hold regular one-on-one meetings with teachers to discuss their progress, tackle concerns, and celebrate achievements. By building strong relationships based on trust, transformational leaders empower educators to share their ideas and concerns, promoting a culture of transparency and accountability within the school.[23]

Enhancing Student Outcomes

The ultimate goal of transformational leadership in education is to enhance student outcomes. Research indicates that when educators are engaged and motivated, they are more likely to inspire their students to excel academically. Transformational leaders can implement initiatives that directly impact student learning, such as personalized learning plans, differentiated instruction, and inclusive practices that address diverse learning needs. By focusing on the holistic development of both educators and students, transformational leaders cultivate a dynamic learning environment that fosters academic success and personal growth.[24]

The practical applications of transformational leadership in educational settings are diverse and significant. By promoting collaboration, encouraging innovation,

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[23] Northouse, *Leadership*, 150.

[24] Sonya Douglass Horsford, ed., *New Perspectives in Educational Leadership: Exploring Social, Political, and Community Contexts and Meaning* (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2010), 187.

investing in professional development, building trust, and ultimately enhancing student outcomes, transformational leaders play a vital role in shaping positive educational experiences. As schools continue to navigate the complexities of modern education, the principles of transformational leadership will remain crucial in creating thriving learning environments that benefit both educators and students alike.

Resistance to Change

One of the most formidable challenges in implementing transformational leadership is the inherent resistance to change that often exists within organizations. Employees who have spent years functioning under traditional, hierarchical leadership models may struggle to adapt to a more fluid and collaborative approach. This resistance can take various forms, including skepticism about the new leadership style, reluctance to participate in shared decision-making, and a general fear of the unknown.[25] To effectively address this resistance, transformational leaders must prioritize clear communication. This involves not only articulating the vision and goals of the transformational approach but also actively listening to the concerns and fears of team members. By creating an environment where employees feel heard and appreciated, leaders can gradually dismantle obstacles to acceptance and foster a more open-minded attitude toward change.

Complexities of Group Dynamics

Another important aspect of implementing transformational leadership is the complexity of group dynamics. In any organization, individuals bring their own unique

[25] Burns, *Leadership*, 68.

backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives, which can create a rich tapestry of ideas but also potential conflicts.[26] Transformational leaders must be skilled at recognizing and managing these complexities. This requires a deep understanding of team members' motivations and interpersonal relationships. Leaders should promote team-building activities and create opportunities for collaboration, allowing individuals to express their viewpoints in a safe and constructive environment. By fostering inclusivity and valuing diverse opinions, transformational leaders can leverage the strengths of their teams while minimizing the risk of discord.

Effective Conflict Resolution Strategies

Conflict is an inevitable part of any organizational environment, especially when adopting a new leadership style that promotes open dialogue and collaborative decision-making. Transformational leaders need to possess effective conflict resolution strategies to navigate disagreements that may occur. This not only involves mediating disputes but also cultivating a culture in which constructive criticism is embraced and viewed as a means of growth. Leaders can conduct regular feedback sessions, encouraging team members to express their thoughts on processes and decisions. Furthermore, training in conflict resolution techniques can empower employees to manage disagreements independently, fostering a sense of ownership and accountability within the team. By addressing conflicts quickly and constructively, transformational leaders can sustain a positive organizational atmosphere and reinforce the importance of collaboration.[27]

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[26] Burns, *Leadership*, 179.

[27] Joseph Folger, Marshall Scott Poole, and Randall K. Stutman, *Working Through Conflict: Strategies for Relationships, Groups, and Organizations* (London, UK: Taylor and Francis, 2015), 136.

Building a Cohesive Organizational Culture

Creating a cohesive organizational culture is paramount for successfully implementing transformational leadership. A strong culture aligns team members' values and behaviors with the organization's overarching goals.[28] Transformational leaders are instrumental in shaping this culture by modeling the behaviors they want to see in their teams, which include demonstrating empathy, integrity, and a commitment to ongoing improvement. Leaders should also celebrate successes, big and small, to reinforce positive behaviors and motivate team members. Regular team meetings, social events, and recognition programs can further strengthen employee bonds, fostering a sense of belonging and shared purpose. By cultivating a cohesive culture, transformational leaders can boost employee engagement and drive collective efforts toward achieving organizational objectives.

Continuous Learning and Adaptation

Ultimately, the journey of implementing transformational leadership is not a one-time event but an ongoing process of learning and adaptation. Leaders must stay open to feedback and be willing to adjust their strategies as needed. This demands a commitment to personal and professional development, as well as a readiness to embrace new ideas and approaches. Transformational leaders should seek mentorship, attend workshops, and participate in peer learning opportunities to sharpen their skills and keep up with emerging trends in leadership. By modeling a growth mindset, leaders can inspire their teams to adopt similar attitudes, creating an environment where innovation and creativity

[28] Burns, *Leadership*, 198.

can flourish. In this way, the challenges tied to implementing transformational leadership can be turned into opportunities for growth and development, ultimately resulting in a more resilient and dynamic organization.[29]

Conclusion

In conclusion, exploring transformational leadership reveals its profound implications for both individual and community growth. By emphasizing the relational aspects of leadership and aligning with the principles of Missional Theology, transformational leaders can create environments that empower young adults to engage in meaningful discipleship. Furthermore, applying transformational leadership within educational settings highlights its potential to enhance organizational culture and improve staff sustainability. As leaders continue to navigate the complexities of their roles, the principles of transformational leadership will remain essential for fostering positive change and building resilient communities.

The Importance of Relational Leadership

Transformational leadership is fundamentally rooted in the quality of relationships between leaders and their followers. This relational aspect is crucial because it fosters trust, respect, and mutual understanding. Leaders who prioritize these relationships are more likely to inspire their followers to rise above their self-interests for the collective good. This is especially significant in contexts such as churches, non-profits, and community organizations, where the mission often centers on service and

[29] Northouse, *Leadership*, 232.

collective goals. By investing time and effort into building strong, authentic relationships, transformational leaders can cultivate a sense of belonging and commitment among their followers, which is essential for effective discipleship. This relational dynamic not only enhances individual growth but also fortifies the community as a whole, creating a supportive network that encourages participation and engagement.[30]

Aligning with Missional Theology

Missional Theology emphasizes the church's role in participating in God's mission to the world, which seamlessly aligns with the principles of transformational leadership. Leaders who adopt a transformational approach can effectively communicate a vision that resonates with the core values of Missional Theology, such as service, community, and outreach. By embodying these values, transformational leaders inspire young adults to take active roles in their communities, fostering a culture of discipleship that extends beyond the walls of the church.[31] This alignment enhances not only the spiritual growth of individuals but also encourages collective action toward social justice, community service, and global missions. As young adults engage in these meaningful activities, they develop a deeper understanding of their faith and its implications for their lives and the world around them.

[30] Michelle C. Bligh and Ronald E. Riggio, eds., *Exploring Distance in Leader-follower Relationships: When Near is Far and Far is Near* (London, UK: Routledge, 2013), 18.

[31] Van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church*, 216.

Transformational Leadership in Educational Settings

The implementation of transformational leadership in educational settings is especially significant. Schools and educational institutions often serve as microcosms of larger societal structures, and the culture within these environments can greatly influence both staff and student experiences. Transformational leaders in education can cultivate a positive organizational culture that emphasizes collaboration, innovation, and continuous improvement. By creating an environment where educators feel valued and supported, transformational leaders can boost staff retention, reduce turnover rates, and enhance job satisfaction. This, in turn, results in better student outcomes, as motivated and engaged educators are more likely to inspire and connect with their students. Moreover, transformational leadership promotes professional development and lifelong learning, equipping educators with the necessary tools to adapt to the ever-evolving landscape of education.

Navigating Complexities with Transformational Leadership

As leaders continue to navigate the complexities of their roles in an increasingly dynamic world, the principles of transformational leadership remain essential. The challenges leaders face today—such as technological advancements, cultural shifts, and global crises—require a flexible and adaptive approach.[32] Transformational leaders are uniquely positioned to respond to these challenges by fostering an innovative and resilient environment. They encourage their teams to embrace change, think creatively, and collaborate effectively, which is crucial in tackling the multifaceted issues that arise

[32] Burns, *Leadership*, 204.

in various contexts. By prioritizing the development of their followers and creating a shared vision for the future, transformational leaders can drive positive change and build resilient communities that thrive in the face of adversity.[33]

A Call to Action

In summary, the implications of transformational leadership extend well beyond personal and organizational growth; they encompass the very fabric of community life. As we reflect on the principles of transformational leadership, it is crucial for both current and aspiring leaders to embrace these concepts and actively apply them in their contexts. By doing this, they can cultivate environments that not only empower individuals but also promote collective action toward a greater purpose. The call to action is clear: leaders must commit to developing their relational skills, align their missions with the values of Missional Theology, and foster cultures of support and innovation. In doing so, they will not only enhance their effectiveness as leaders but also contribute to the creation of vibrant, resilient communities capable of navigating the complexities of the modern world.

[33] William E. Rosenbach, *Contemporary Issues in Leadershi*p (London, UK: Taylor and Francis, 2018), 78.

CHAPTER SIX

PROJECT ANALYSIS

Introduction

The culmination of the researcher's Doctor of Ministry journey has been deeply rooted in a vision to restore and revitalize young adult discipleship within Greenleaf Christian Church. Throughout this program, academic study, ministerial reflection, and practical fieldwork have consistently pointed to the need for an intentional, biblically grounded, and contextually relevant approach to spiritual formation for young adults. The disruption in discipleship programming at Greenleaf created a vacuum that hindered the spiritual growth, engagement, and retention of young adults within the church. This project emerged as both a theological and practical response to that challenge, integrating insights gained throughout the doctoral studies with the lived realities of ministry in this congregation.

The project was shaped by two pivotal phases of the researcher's doctoral work: the synergy and the integration processes. The synergy established the theological and ministry foundations for this work, underscoring the essential role of young adult discipleship in the life and future of the church. It argued that equipping leaders with the tools, wisdom, and spiritual grounding necessary for this task is critical not only for program implementation but also for fostering a lasting culture of discipleship. Proverbs 22:6 served as a biblical anchor, highlighting the long-term significance of purposeful

faith formation. Just as Solomon stressed the importance of wisdom and purposeful leadership, this project called for church leaders to be both spiritually formed and practically trained to guide young adults effectively.

The integration extended this work by grounding the project in biblical, historical, theological, interdisciplinary, and practical frameworks that together shaped its direction. The exploration of Proverbs 22:6 was paired with the historical example of Catherine Ferguson's pioneering efforts in establishing Sunday school, highlighting the enduring value of structured discipleship for emerging generations. The project was also informed by Missional Theology, which insists that discipleship must be outward-facing, and transformational leadership theory, which emphasizes equipping and inspiring leaders to cultivate change. These strands of theological and ministerial reflection converged to develop a strategy tailored to Greenleaf's local context. This process was coupled with a recommendation for a county-wide needs assessment to ensure that the ministry is responsive to the specific realities of young adults in the surrounding community.

Together, these foundations shaped the design and implementation of the seven-session training program at the heart of this project. The program was intentionally designed to provide a balance of theological instruction, leadership development, and practical ministry design, while also cultivating spiritual formation practices and relational engagement through the incorporation of qualitative research methods, including group discussions, questionnaires, and observations. The project enabled measurable evaluation while maintaining sensitivity to participants lived experiences. This design ensured adaptability, keeping the program relevant and practical as young adults' needs continue to evolve.

A central insight that emerged through both the synergy and integration work was the indispensable role of relationships in practical discipleship. While curriculum, leadership training, and structured programming are necessary, they are insufficient without the nurturing of authentic, supportive, and spiritually enriching relationships. Young adults flourish when they feel seen, valued, and connected to a community that invests in their growth. Thus, this project intentionally emphasized relational discipleship, mentorship, and accountability structures that strengthen not only individuals but the church body as a whole.

The journey toward this final project and document demonstrates the integrated nature of the doctoral program itself. Each phase of coursework, research, and practical engagement provided insights that refined both the theological vision and the project's practical design. The synergy established the need and the theological rationale. The integration work broadened the scope by drawing on historical, missional, and leadership insights. The project's implementation brought these ideas into the congregation's lived reality. In this way, the final project is not an isolated effort but the culmination of study, reflection, and ministry practice, representing the convergence of academic theology and practical ecclesial leadership.

This chapter sets the stage for a deeper exploration of the project's implementation, evaluation, and outcomes. It highlights how theological reflection, historical insight, leadership theory, and practical ministry strategy came together to address a pressing need within Greenleaf Christian Church. The work presented in this final chapter is therefore not only the product of academic inquiry but also a testimony to the Spirit's guidance in shaping a renewed vision for young adult discipleship. By

equipping leaders, fostering relationships, and grounding ministry in biblical wisdom, the project seeks to establish a sustainable model of discipleship that strengthens the church today and leaves a legacy for generations to come.

Methodology

The purpose of this project was to provide church leaders at Greenleaf Christian Church with the theological grounding, practical strategies, and relational tools necessary to reinstitute and sustain a young adult discipleship ministry. For years, Greenleaf experienced disruptions in its intentional discipleship programming, particularly for young adults. This absence created a void in faith formation during a life stage often characterized by transitions, questions, and decisions with long-term impact. The goal of this project, therefore, was not only to reestablish a ministry program but to cultivate a sustainable culture of discipleship that is biblically sound, historically informed, missionally oriented, and relationally grounded.

The project was designed around a seven-session training program for existing and emerging church leaders. These leaders, who were already vested in the church's ministries, were equipped through a curriculum that combined biblical, theological, historical, and interdisciplinary insights. While the direct participants were church leaders and volunteers, the ultimate beneficiaries of this effort are young adults aged eighteen to thirty-five. By preparing leaders for long-term ministry engagement, this project created a framework for young adults to experience authentic discipleship, spiritual formation, and mentoring relationships that foster both inward Christian growth and outward missional purpose.

Project Design and Approach

The project employed a qualitative research design, with the primary objective of exploring participants' lived experiences, reflections, and perceptions rather than quantifying outcomes. The qualitative approach enabled a richer understanding of how leadership training can shape discipleship practices in the local church.

Participant Learning Through the Four Foundational Pillars

The participants' learning outcomes can best be summarized by the four foundational pillars of the project: biblical, historical, theological, and interdisciplinary. Each pillar was integrated into the training, shaping leaders' understanding and approach to discipleship ministry.

Biblical Foundation

The training began with Proverbs 22:6 (NRSV) as the anchor text: “Train children in the right way, and when old, they will not stray.” This scriptural principle underscored the importance of intentional formation and the long-term trajectory of discipleship. Participants reflected not only on the promise of this verse but also on the pitfalls of Solomon’s own leadership, recognizing the consequences of neglecting consistent faith formation. As Mark DeVries reminds us, “If we fail to form young people in faith intentionally, culture will catechize them for us.”[1]

[1] Mark DeVries, *Family-Based Youth Ministry*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 42.

Historical Foundation

The story of Catherine Ferguson, an ex-slave who pioneered Sunday school in the United States, provided participants with a powerful example of resilience, innovation, and holistic discipleship. Her ministry addressed both the spiritual and practical needs of children, equipping them with life skills while grounding them in the Christian faith. One participant reflected that learning about Ferguson was "eye-opening from the historical view to the endless possibilities." Her example illustrates what Wilmore describes as the "indomitable spirit of African American faith, which refuses to separate salvation from liberation."[2] Ferguson's witness inspired participants to see discipleship not only as personal formation but also as social responsibility.

Theological Foundation

Missional Theology shaped participants' understanding of discipleship as both inward formation and outward participation in God's work in the world. Leaders were challenged to help young adults see themselves as co-laborers in God's mission, not merely recipients of spiritual instruction. As Bosch asserts, "Mission is more than and different from recruitment to our brand of religion; it is alerting people to the universal reign of God."[3] This broadened participants' vision for young adult ministry, encouraging them to move beyond programmatic efforts and cultivate a discipleship that engages real-world justice, service, and evangelism.

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[2] Gayraud S. Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism: An Interpretation of the Religious History of African Americans*, 3rd ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998), 5.

[3] David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 519.

Interdisciplinary Foundation

Finally, integrating transformational leadership theory gave participants concrete skills for leading with authenticity, vision, and empowerment. The "Four I's" of transformational leadership—Idealized Influence, Inspirational Motivation, Intellectual Stimulation, and Individualized Consideration—were repeatedly referenced by participants as critical takeaways. Bass and Riggio emphasize that transformational leaders "inspire followers to transcend their own self-interest for the good of the group, organization, or society."[4] This insight helped participants recognize that discipling young adults requires leaders who can inspire, mentor, and empower them to take ownership of their faith and ministry.

Each training session included a combination of instruction, discussion, and reflective practice. Participants engaged in Scripture, examined case studies, reflected on their own leadership roles, and applied concepts to the specific context of Greenleaf Christian Church.

A unique element of the training program was the ministry model creation exercise. Using a template designed by the researcher, participants collaborated to create ministry plans aligned with the church's mission, vision, and pastoral direction. This ensured that leaders did not simply absorb theoretical content but left the training with concrete strategies for rebuilding the young adult discipleship ministry.

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[4] Bernard M. Bass and Ronald E. Riggio, *Transformational Leadership*, 2nd ed. (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2006), 5.

Participants

The primary participants in this project were church leaders and volunteers committed to revitalizing young adult discipleship. These individuals were recruited based on their ministry involvement, their influence within the congregation, and their demonstrated passion for nurturing young adult faith formation. While the number of participants was limited to ensure manageability and depth of engagement, the diversity of perspectives enriched the training experience.

Though young adults were not direct participants in the training, they remain the ultimate focus of this initiative. The revitalized ministry will serve young adults between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five, offering them intentional discipleship pathways. By equipping leaders first, the project established a foundation for sustainable ministry that can be directly implemented with and for young adults soon.

Data Collection

The project employed multiple qualitative data collection methods to capture participants' experiences and reflections, including pre-questionnaire, discussion questions, journal entries, and ministry model creation.

Pre-Questionnaire

At the outset of the program, participants completed a survey to assess their prior knowledge, attitudes, and practices regarding discipleship, leadership, and ministry with young adults. This baseline data provided insight into existing strengths and gaps. At the conclusion of the program, the post-questionnaire participants completed a follow-up

survey. This instrument measured changes in knowledge, confidence, and ministry readiness, providing a point of comparison with the pre-questionnaire.

Discussion Questions

Weekly sessions incorporated guided discussion questions to prompt reflection and application. Notes and transcripts from these discussions became a rich source of qualitative data.

Journal Entries

Participants were encouraged to keep journals throughout the seven sessions within the study guide workbook created by the researcher. These journals allowed them to document personal insights, challenges, and areas of growth. Journals also revealed shifts in perspective and highlighted recurring themes.

Ministry Model Creation

The final session of the program required participants to design a ministry model using the researcher's template. These ministry plans served both as practical outcomes and as research data, reflecting how participants integrated biblical, theological, historical, and leadership insights into actionable strategies. The combination of these tools ensured that the data reflected both cognitive learning and personal transformation.

Data Analysis

The data was analyzed through a thematic coding process. Pre- and post-questionnaires were compared to identify growth areas, recurring challenges, and shifts in leadership readiness. Journal entries and discussion notes were reviewed for recurring themes such as relational discipleship, the importance of mentorship, or the need for sustainable structures. The ministry models were analyzed for alignment with the church's mission and vision, as well as creativity and feasibility. This multi-source data analysis provided a comprehensive understanding of how the training impacted participants' theological perspectives, leadership practices, and readiness to engage young adults in discipleship.

Rationale for the Approach

The design of this project was guided by theological, practical, historical, and interdisciplinary considerations that together created a holistic framework for leadership development. At the heart of the theological rationale was Proverbs 22:6, which underscores the necessity of intentional and formative instruction. This scriptural grounding reinforced the conviction that leaders must first be spiritually rooted before they can guide others. On a practical level, young adult ministry requires contextual relevance and relational depth, qualities that cannot be fostered solely through programs. By training leaders to cultivate authentic relationships and develop engagement strategies, the project sought to build a sustainable, impactful model of discipleship.

Historically, Catherine Ferguson's example served as a powerful reminder of how intentional discipleship can shape not only individuals but also entire communities. Her

commitment to holistic formation, addressing both spiritual and practical needs, challenged participants to embrace a broad vision of ministry. Finally, the interdisciplinary lens of transformational leadership theory provided a valuable framework for equipping leaders. Rather than focusing on management or control, this approach emphasized mentorship, empowerment, and inspiration as central practices. Together, these four perspectives (biblical, theological, historical, and leadership) ensured that the methodology was comprehensive, integrated, and contextually relevant for Greenleaf Christian Church.

Limitations

Although the project successfully achieved its core objectives, several limitations must be acknowledged. The first was time. With only seven training sessions allotted, the project was unable to measure long-term transformation or fully evaluate how the new ministry models would function once implemented. Second, the small sample size limited the generalizability of the findings; however, this same limitation allowed for more meaningful engagement and deeper reflection among participants. Another limitation was participant bias, as the leaders involved were members of the church and may have been inclined to provide responses that aligned with pastoral expectations. Finally, while participants successfully developed a ministry model, the actual implementation and testing of this model with young adults exceeded the project's scope and timeframe.

Ethical Considerations

The project followed ethical research guidelines appropriate for a ministry context. Participation was voluntary, and participants were informed of the project's purpose and scope. All responses, journals, and questionnaires were treated confidentially. Care was taken to ensure that no participant felt coerced or evaluated in ways that would impact their standing in the church. Additionally, the researcher remained attentive to pastoral sensitivity, recognizing the spiritual dimensions of participants' reflections and growth.

This methodology ensured that the project was both academically rigorous and pastorally relevant. By combining structured training with multiple avenues for reflection and data collection, the project captured participants' growth and transformation while equipping them with practical strategies for ministry. The chosen approach reflects the conviction that effective discipleship requires both theological depth and relational practice.

Implementation

The implementation of this project followed a seven-session training program at Greenleaf Christian Church, designed to equip church leaders and volunteers for the revitalization of young-adult discipleship. The training was conducted in phases, moving from biblical and historical foundations to theological and leadership frameworks, and finally to program design and the creation of ministry models. Each session involved structured sessions, guided assignments, journaling, and collaborative work, all of

which contributed to the development of a reproducible ministry model for young adult discipleship.

The implementation largely followed the project proposal outlined in the candidacy review packet, with some adjustments to address scheduling challenges, participant needs, and opportunities for deeper engagement. This section provides a detailed account of the implementation process, including the sequence of sessions, participant involvement, and project milestones.

Session One: Orientation and Biblical Foundations

The first session launched with a clear articulation of the project's purpose, expectations, and outcomes. Participants received binders containing study materials, journal prompts, and questionnaires to be used throughout the training for both reflection and data collection. The session began with prayer, followed by the distribution of informed consent forms, which participants signed and returned to the researcher for ethical recordkeeping.

A pre-discipleship questionnaire was administered to establish baseline perspectives on discipleship, leadership, and ministry engagement. Participants were then introduced to Proverbs 22:6, which provided the biblical foundation for the training. The lesson emphasized intentional and relational discipleship as an enduring model for long-term spiritual growth.

Assignments for this session were intentionally designed to deepen reflection and prepare participants for continued engagement with the training. Each leader was asked to complete journal prompts that invited them to reflect on their personal discipleship

experiences, providing a space for honest self-examination and growth. In addition, participants prepared responses to discussion questions through a shared digital link, creating opportunities for collaborative dialogue and shared insight. Finally, they were tasked with reviewing the biblical foundation of Proverbs 22:6 in advance of the upcoming sessions, ensuring that the next stage of training would remain firmly rooted in scripture. This session also included an overview of the project's trajectory, underscoring that participants would ultimately be tasked with designing a young adult discipleship model tailored to Greenleaf's context.

Session Two: Solomon's Leadership and Biblical Analysis

Building on the foundation of Proverbs 22:6, the second session explored Solomon's wisdom and leadership style. Participants studied Solomon's strengths and failures, with an emphasis on how his experiences informed his writings. Pamela guided participants in a textual analysis of Proverbs 22:6, including key Hebrew terms and their theological implications for spiritual formation.

Participants discussed three questions related to Solomon's leadership and submitted responses via a digital form for data collection. Journals provided additional space for participants to process how Solomon's leadership challenges reflected their own ministry contexts. This session concluded with a reflection on how Greenleaf's leaders could emulate Solomon's wisdom while avoiding his pitfalls, especially in discipling young adults in today's world.

Sessions Three and Four: Missional Theology and Transformational Leadership

The third and fourth sessions shifted toward theological and leadership foundations. Session Three introduced Missional Theology, grounding participants in the biblical mandate for the church to participate in God's mission (Gen. 12; Matt. 28; Acts 1). Leaders were challenged to view young adult discipleship as both inward spiritual formation and outward missional engagement. Discussions emphasized redefining the church not merely as a building but as a people on mission, with success measured by transformed lives rather than attendance numbers.

Session Four focused on transformational leadership. Pamela explained the four "I's" of transformational leadership—Idealized Influence, Inspirational Motivation, Intellectual Stimulation, and Individualized Consideration—and connected them to ministry practice. Participants identified which of these traits came naturally and which required intentional growth.

Group discussions highlighted challenges young adults often face with church leadership, including a lack of listening, limited mentoring, and dismissive attitudes. By reflecting on both positive and negative experiences, participants began to articulate practical strategies for building authentic mentorship relationships. Assignments included completing journal prompts, responding to Google form questions, and preparing for the program design workshop. Pamela also distributed updated materials, including a workbook and study guide, and provided space for feedback and adjustments.

Sessions Five and Seven: Ministry Model Creation

The final three sessions centered on the practical design of ministry models. Using the researcher's ministry model template, participants collaborated to create young adult discipleship plans aligned with Greenleaf's mission, vision, and pastoral direction. In developing the ministry model, participants worked to establish a framework that reflected both biblical conviction and practical strategy. They began by identifying core values that emphasized inclusivity, intergenerational mentorship, and meaningful community engagement, ensuring the ministry would be both welcoming and holistic. These values were then woven into carefully crafted mission statements that connected the proposed young adult ministry to Greenleaf's broader identity, grounding the initiative in the church's overall vision and purpose.

Attention was also given to leadership roles, with responsibilities clearly defined for team building, mentorship, and the creation of discipleship pipelines. To move the ministry from vision to practice, participants designed a phased outreach strategy—one that would begin with small groups, expand into peer mentoring, and ultimately culminate in structured accountability partnerships.

The group also considered community engagement as a vital component of the ministry's mission, envisioning initiatives such as feeding programs, disaster relief efforts, and partnerships with organizations like World Vision and Camp Caroline for spiritual retreats. Finally, participants turned to sustainability planning, outlining practical steps such as budgeting, establishing a social media presence, creating branding, and preparing for leadership transitions. Together, these elements formed a comprehensive

model designed not only to launch but also to sustain a thriving young adult discipleship ministry.

Participants worked both individually and collaboratively, drafting sections of the ministry model that Pamela later compiled into a unified framework. Two distinct ministry concepts, “Breakthrough” and “Awakening,” emerged, reflecting creativity and alignment with the church’s mission. Assignments during this phase included completing journal prompts, finalizing sections of the ministry model, and submitting a post-study questionnaire to capture reflections on the entire training process.

Deviations from the Original Plan

While the project adhered closely to the candidacy proposal, a few deviations emerged during implementation. Session adjustments were necessary due to technical issues during online meetings, which at times required Pamela to reformat and resend materials, resulting in extended review periods. In addition to the planned virtual sessions, in-person gatherings were incorporated, often centered around shared meals that fostered fellowship and created space for informal mentorship. The process also shifted from Pamela carrying full responsibility of compiling the ministry model to a more collaborative approach, with participants taking ownership of individual sections and contributing directly to the final document. Finally, a measure of timeline flexibility was introduced, with specific assignments extended to accommodate participants’ schedules. This adjustment ensured full engagement without placing undue pressure on those involved, reinforcing the project's relational and participatory nature. These deviations

ultimately strengthened the project, enabling deeper engagement, stronger relational bonds, and a more sustainable ministry outcome.

Summary of Implementation

The seven-session training program unfolded as a holistic and participatory process that combined biblical teaching, theological exploration, historical reflection, leadership development, and practical program design. Each phase was intentionally built on the last, moving participants from scriptural and historical grounding to contemporary leadership application, and finally to concrete ministry planning.

By the end of the project, participants not only increased their knowledge of young adult discipleship and spiritual formation but also developed ministry models tailored to Greenleaf Christian Church's context. The implementation process revealed the power of combining theological reflection with relational mentoring and practical leadership development, providing a strong foundation for revitalizing young adult discipleship.

Summary of Learnings

The central purpose of this project was to equip church leaders at Greenleaf Christian Church with the theological grounding, relational strategies, and practical tools necessary to revitalize the congregation's young adult discipleship ministry. For many years, the church had experienced an observable gap in its ability to engage and retain young adults between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five. While the church maintained a vibrant ministry presence in the community, the lack of a sustainable young-adult

discipleship pathway hindered its long-term ability to foster spiritual growth, leadership development, and intergenerational continuity.

This project hypothesized that an intentional training program, rooted in biblical principles of discipleship and supported by transformational leadership theory, could provide church leaders with the skills and confidence to rebuild this crucial ministry. By blending theological reflection, historical case studies, and practical leadership development, the training aimed to produce leaders who not only understood the foundations of discipleship but could also implement sustainable strategies tailored to the needs of young adults in the contemporary church and society.

The training also emphasized relational approaches rather than event-driven programming. Instead of focusing solely on hosting activities for young adults, participants were encouraged to embrace mentorship, discipleship partnerships, and leadership models that prioritize authenticity, empowerment, and accountability. The overarching goal was not simply to create another ministry program, but to equip leaders who could sustain a reproducible model of young adult discipleship that is consistent with the mission and vision of Greenleaf Christian Church.

Summary of Learning: Qualitative Findings from Group Sessions

The seven-session training program generated a rich collection of qualitative data through discussion questions, journaling, and group reflection. The responses from participants revealed key insights into both the challenges of past ministry efforts and the possibilities for revitalizing young adult discipleship at Greenleaf Christian Church. Across sessions, the themes of authenticity, empowerment, intentional training, and

relational leadership emerged consistently, underscoring the importance of transformational leadership in shaping sustainable discipleship.

Session Two: Training, Commitment, and Leadership Styles

The second session focused on understanding the role of training and leadership in shaping strong discipleship practices. When asked what leaders could learn and apply to their own leadership, participants emphasized the need to move from the complex to the simple to train effectively. They recognized that strategy and clarity were vital for building sustainable ministry structures. Leaders also noted that relying on a single leadership style would be inadequate, stressing the importance of an adaptive, multidimensional approach.

A major theme that emerged was commitment and sincerity. Participants reflected that leadership must be rooted in a sense of divine calling, marked by compassion, integrity, and accountability. As one noted, “We had to understand that this style came from God. We must be committed.” This insight demonstrated a growing awareness that effective leadership is less about personal charisma and more about faithfully embodying Christlike character in service to others.

The second discussion question pressed participants to reflect on what “training” truly involves in nurturing children into young adults with a strong spiritual foundation. Responses highlighted consistency, intentional modeling, and personal example. Leaders insisted that children and young adults must see faith not only taught but lived out before them. Consistent exposure to godly examples, rooted in scripture, was considered

indispensable for spiritual growth. This session made clear that leaders must integrate discipline, modeling, and intentional guidance if discipleship is to bear long-term fruit.

Session Three: Relationships, Mentorship, and the Value of Listening

The third session invited participants to examine both positive and negative experiences they had as young adults with mentors, teachers, and church leaders. When asked about pitfalls in past relationship-building efforts, participants identified a lack of authenticity as a consistent barrier. Leaders in their own youth often had "wrong motives," were unwilling to listen, or dismissed young adults' opinions altogether. Others described outdated views and rigid approaches, which left them feeling disconnected and silenced. This highlighted a clear relational gap: young adults desire leaders who are authentic, relevant, and willing to adapt.

In contrast, when recalling positive experiences, participants described mentors who saw their potential, believed in them, and invested time. Teachers who made students feel seen, affirmed their gifts, and encouraged risk-taking left a lasting impact—even decades later. These stories underscored the transformational power of affirmation and individualized attention. Positive mentors were not simply authorities but guides who nurtured confidence and growth, leaving an enduring imprint on participants' lives.

Negative experiences, however, were equally formative. Leaders recalled hypocrisy—adults saying one thing but living another—along with harsh attitudes and authoritarian approaches. Many described being told what to do without being given a voice or opportunity to grow. Such failures reinforced the harm of transactional, top-down leadership, which prioritizes compliance over development.

Finally, participants reflected on the overall clarity and impact of the session. One stated, “This lesson has been clear and concise, therefore significant.” Another affirmed that the study provided new perspectives that would directly influence their approach to engaging young adults. Taken together, Session Three confirmed that effective discipleship requires authenticity, empathy, and shared participation, not merely instruction.

Session Four: Applying the Four I’s of Transformational Leadership

By Session Four, participants began explicitly connecting their reflections to the framework of transformational leadership—the four I’s: Idealized Influence, Inspirational Motivation, Intellectual Stimulation, and Individualized Consideration. For Idealized Influence, participants emphasized the importance of building trust, demonstrating integrity, and living in a way that young adults would want to emulate. They recognized that leadership begins with character and credibility, not titles. Under Inspirational Motivation, leaders highlighted the importance of role modeling, motivating others, and encouraging creativity. They saw discipleship as an opportunity to inspire young adults to take ownership, solve problems, and lead initiatives themselves.

Intellectual Stimulation emerged as a call to listen attentively, invite participation in planning, and create connections with topics young adults found relevant. Leaders recognized that discipleship must engage the mind and imagination, empowering young adults to think critically and act faithfully. Finally, Individualized Consideration was expressed through a commitment to building authentic relationships, treating young adults as equal partners, and nurturing their unique gifts. Participants affirmed that

leadership must be relational, equitable, and tailored, not uniform or authoritarian. The responses revealed a clear progression: participants moved from an abstract understanding of leadership theory to practical applications for ministry. They recognized that transformational leadership is not merely a framework but a lived practice of Christlike service, one that requires integrity, empathy, and empowerment.

Synthesis of Sessions Two Through Four

Together, the discussions across these three sessions reveal a central insight: effective young adult discipleship depends on authentic, relational, and transformational leadership. Participants consistently emphasized the need for leaders who embody integrity, listen actively, empower creativity, and treat young adults as partners rather than passive recipients. Both positive and negative past experiences reinforced the truth that discipleship is most impactful when rooted in trust, encouragement, and intentional formation.

This qualitative data strongly supports the project's initial hypothesis: that equipping leaders with theological, historical, and leadership tools can revitalize young adult discipleship at Greenleaf Christian Church. Participants not only absorbed new concepts but also began to envision concrete practices that would shape their engagement with young adults moving forward.

Data Collection Overview

The data for this project were gathered through a qualitative research design that prioritized reflective and experiential learning. Participants engaged in several data

collection methods, including pre- and post-questionnaires, journal prompts, discussion questions, and the creation of a ministry model.

Pre- and post-questionnaires were designed to measure changes in participants' confidence, theological understanding, and leadership capacity. These instruments provided insight into how participants' perspectives shifted over the seven-week training. Journal prompts were weekly reflective exercises that encouraged participants to process what they were learning in relation to their personal ministry context. These written responses offered valuable qualitative data regarding participants' growth and highlighted common themes. The discussion questions were facilitated during sessions and later submitted in writing. These questions allowed for both group interaction and individual reflection. They were particularly effective in drawing out participant insights regarding biblical foundations, leadership theory, and relational ministry. Each participant was required to create a practical ministry model aligned with the mission and vision of Greenleaf Christian Church. These models provided evidence of participants' ability to translate theoretical learning into concrete strategies for young adult discipleship. Together, these tools provided a holistic picture of what participants learned, how their perspectives developed, and what implications this training has for the church's future young adult ministry.

Participant Learning: Final Journal Prompt Analysis

The journal prompt responses and written reflections revealed several consistent themes across participants. While everyone brought unique experiences and perspectives, various areas of learning emerged as particularly significant.

Alignment with the Mission and Vision of the Church

Several participants emphasized the importance of ensuring that young adult ministry remains grounded in the broader mission and vision of Greenleaf Christian Church. One participant captured this insight well, writing: "You don't birth something that is not in line with the mission of the church." This comment reflects the participants' awareness that discipleship ministries cannot function as isolated or personality-driven initiatives. Instead, they must be deeply connected to the theological identity and pastoral vision of the congregation.

Participants recognized that young adult ministry must not simply provide programming but must embody the church's mission of spiritual growth, justice, and community engagement. This represents a significant shift from event-based approaches toward mission-driven, sustainable models.

Transformational Leadership Development

Another dominant theme was the value of transformational leadership theory, particularly the framework of the "Four I's": Idealized Influence, Inspirational Motivation, Intellectual Stimulation, and Individualized Consideration. Participants noted that these leadership principles provided practical strategies for engaging young adults in ways that inspire trust and authenticity.

For example, one participant reflected that young adults today are "cautious when approached to see what your motives are, being sincere and your character." The emphasis on sincerity, character, and relational trust reflects the connection between transformational leadership and effective discipleship. Leaders recognized that embracing

these principles will be crucial to mentoring young adults and fostering a long-term commitment to the church community.

Practical Ministry Design and Action Planning

Participants also learned the importance of structured planning and program design. One participant expressed appreciation for the opportunity to create a ministry model, noting that the training clarified "what is needed to develop a sustainable young adult discipleship and spiritual formation ministry." Others emphasized the importance of aligning ministry design with the needs and voices of young adults themselves, rather than imposing top-down strategies. This insight demonstrates participants' growing awareness that ministry effectiveness requires collaboration and contextual sensitivity. Rather than designing programs in isolation, leaders must invite young adults into the planning process to ensure that discipleship efforts are relevant, empowering, and mission-aligned.

Relational and Empowering Approaches

Several participants emphasized the value of relational ministry, particularly the importance of mentoring and empowering young adults to take risks. One participant summarized this learning by stating that the most valuable lessons included "giving the young adults a chance to be risk takers" and "including them in the decision-making." This represents a shift from more traditional hierarchical models of leadership toward collaborative, intergenerational partnerships. Participants recognized that empowering young adults does not mean relinquishing theological or organizational clarity. Rather, it

involves creating space for young adults to explore, lead, and grow while being supported by experienced mentors and leaders.

Organizational Skills and Accountability

Finally, participants emphasized the importance of organizational skills, including accountability, commitment, and clear goals. One reflection emphasized that "organization, commitment, and accountability are key components to a successful adult ministry." This insight underscores the participants' recognition that sustainable ministry requires structure, measurable goals, and follow-through. At the same time, participants balanced these organizational concerns with a continued focus on relational discipleship and spiritual authenticity. In other words, accountability and structure must support, rather than overshadow, the church's mission of making disciples.

Emerging Insights from Participants

In addition to these themes, participants offered insights that went beyond the formal prompts. Several reflected on the historical study of Catherine Ferguson, noting how her perseverance and innovation served as inspiration for reimagining young adult ministry today. One participant wrote that the training was "eye-opening from the historical view to the endless possibilities," while another emphasized that Catherine Ferguson's model should not be limited to one individual but should "flow, start in the middle, and reproduce." These reflections suggest that participants not only learned about practical ministry strategies but also began to develop a theological imagination for innovative ministry. By connecting biblical foundations, historical case studies, and

contemporary leadership theory, participants demonstrated a holistic understanding of what it means to equip young adults for discipleship and leadership.

Conclusion

The implementation and analysis of Equipping a New Generation: An Integrated Pathway for Young Adult Discipleship and Spiritual Formation have revealed both the depth of the need and the potential for renewal within the life of Greenleaf Christian Church. This project was born out of a recognition that, while the church has historically been a place of strength, compassion, and community transformation, a gap remained in effectively engaging young adults in intentional discipleship. Through seven sessions of focused training, theological reflection, and collaborative ministry design, participating church leaders grew not only in their understanding of discipleship and leadership but also in their capacity to nurture the next generation of believers who are spiritually grounded and missionally engaged.

Summary of Findings and Spiritual Impact

The data gathered through questionnaires, journals, group discussions, and ministry models demonstrated clear evidence of transformation among participants. Leaders expressed newfound clarity regarding the biblical mandate of Proverbs 22:6, interpreting it not simply as parental guidance, but as a collective ecclesial responsibility—to train, form, and release disciples for purposeful living. Participants noted that intentionality, consistency, and modeling were indispensable to shaping spiritual maturity in young adults. The integration of historical insight through Catherine

Ferguson's example reminded leaders that discipleship has always been both spiritual and social, addressing the wholeness of individuals and communities.[5]

Furthermore, the incorporation of Missional Theology repositioned discipleship as outward-facing rather than limited to an internal experience. Leaders began to articulate discipleship not as a classroom experience, but as a lifestyle that reflects God's mission in the world. Darrell Guder emphasizes that "the church is missionary by its very nature,"[6] and this conviction inspired participants to cultivate ministries that connect spiritual growth to community transformation. The application of transformational leadership theory, framed around the Four I's—Idealized Influence, Inspirational Motivation, Intellectual Stimulation, and Individualized Consideration—proved particularly influential. It provided leaders with practical frameworks for building relationships founded on trust, vision, and care. As Bernard Bass and Ronald Riggio note, transformational leadership "raises the level of human conduct and ethical aspiration,"[7] a truth that resonated deeply throughout the project.

Through this training, church leaders became increasingly aware that effective discipleship begins with spiritual authenticity and relational integrity. The journal reflections revealed that leaders learned to listen more attentively, mentor more intentionally, and design ministries that reflect both the heart of their pastor and the

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[5] Janet Cornelius, *When I Can Read My Title Clear: Literacy, Slavery, and Religion in the Antebellum South* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1991), 84–85.

[6] Darrell L. Guder, *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 5.

[7] Bernard M. Bass and Ronald E. Riggio, *Transformational Leadership*, 2nd ed. (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2006), 6.

church's vision. The project thus moved beyond programmatic development toward a renewed culture of discipleship, one characterized by collaboration, humility, and innovation.

Theological and Practical Implications

From a theological perspective, this project affirmed that discipleship is central to the church's identity and mission. Rooted in Scripture, the call to "train up" is a command that requires the full participation of the faith community. The process of training church leaders revealed that discipleship is not static—it evolves in response to the needs of each generation. Missional Theology helped participants frame their ministry efforts as participation in God's ongoing work of renewal and reconciliation. This understanding shifted the leaders' focus from institutional maintenance to spiritual formation that equips young adults to live as ambassadors of Christ in the world.[8] Practically, the project demonstrated that leadership development is essential for ministry sustainability. Equipping leaders with theological understanding and strategic tools ensures that discipleship ministries are not dependent on personality or momentary enthusiasm but are built upon a strong biblical and structural foundation. By the end of the training, participants had developed ministry models that reflected inclusivity, intergenerational mentorship, and community engagement—all while aligning with the mission and vision of Greenleaf Christian Church. This outcome confirmed the project's central hypothesis: that intentional leadership formation results in more effective and sustainable discipleship efforts.

[8] Guder, *Missional Church,* 12.

Additionally, the qualitative data highlighted the importance of relational credibility in ministry. Young adults today, as participants recognized, are highly discerning; they seek authenticity and relevance rather than hierarchy and tradition. The lessons on transformational leadership addressed this reality by encouraging leaders to embody Christlike humility, integrity, and openness. The concept of "leading from alongside," rather than "leading from above," emerged as a powerful metaphor for future ministry practice.

Reflections on Growth and Future Application

Personally and professionally, this project has been a deeply transformative experience. It allowed for the integration of theological study, pastoral practice, and spiritual reflection into a unified expression of ministry leadership. The project's emphasis on formation rather than mere information echoed throughout the sessions, reinforcing the belief that leadership development is, at its core, a spiritual process. Henri Nouwen writes that "Christian leadership is a call to downward mobility,"[9] a reminder that true leadership is expressed in humility and service. The qualitative responses revealed that participants not only gained knowledge but also experienced a renewal of their sense of calling.

The process also revealed the importance of patience and flexibility in ministry innovation. While the seven-week timeframe limited long-term observation, it provided a strong foundation for future development. The participants' feedback emphasized a desire to continue meeting, mentoring, and refining their ministry models. This indicates

[9] Henri J. M. Nouwen*, In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership* (New York, NY: Crossroad, 1989), 62.

that the project has generated sustainable momentum—a living movement toward re-engaging young adults in discipleship and service.

Looking ahead, the project offers a replicable framework for other congregations seeking to revitalize young adult ministry. The combination of theological grounding, historical awareness, and leadership training provides a holistic template adaptable to diverse contexts. Churches that intentionally cultivate leaders who embody the Four I's will likely see increased relational trust, deeper spiritual formation, and stronger intergenerational bridges.

Concluding Vision

In the final analysis, "Equipping a New Generation" stands as both a program and a prophetic call. It invites the church to remember its foundational mission "to make disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28:19-20) and to reimagine how that mission can flourish in a changing world. The data, reflections, and ministry models developed through this project affirm that young adult discipleship is not merely a departmental task but a congregational responsibility. When church leaders are equipped, inspired, and spiritually formed, they can guide others with confidence and compassion. The process attained through this research and project can be used in multiple areas of ministry. It is a leadership model that can be applied across various fields in ministry: gather leaders, equip them from a relational perspective, design a ministry model aligned with the mission/vision, and then implement and execute with a strategic planning guide.

Ultimately, the success of this project lies not in completing a curriculum but in awakening a vision. Greenleaf Christian Church now possesses both the framework and

the leadership capacity to reinvigorate its ministry to young adults. The hope is that through continued training, mentorship, and partnership, a generation of young believers will rise—firm in faith, active in love, and courageous in purpose. In this way, the church continues its sacred call: to equip a new generation not only for service within the sanctuary but for transformation within the world.

APPENDIX A

MINISTRY MODEL CREATION

MINISTRY MODEL CREATION

I. Ministry Overview

1. Ministry Name: AWAKENING

2. Church Mission & Vision Alignment:

- **Church Mission Statement:** To be and to share the Good News of Jesus Christ, witnessing, loving and serving from our doorsteps "to the ends of the earth." Acts 1:8
- **Church Vision Statement:** To be a faithful, growing church that demonstrates true community, deep Christian spirituality and a passion for justice. Micah 6:8
- **How This Ministry Aligns with the Mission & Vision:**
    - [Explain how the discipleship ministry supports the broader mission and vision of the church]

      Our Ministry- Awakening aligns with the mission and vision by supporting the broader mission and vision of the church in being a ministry committed to never be ashamed of our faith heritage by honoring heritage and being intentional on how we show the love of God; being a ministry that follows the example of the master in service to liberation of humanity.

II. Ministry Purpose & Goals

1. Ministry Purpose Statement:
[Provide a concise statement describing the primary purpose of the ministry]

The primary purpose of this ministry is to enlighten participants of the need for young people in the church and develop future leaders in the church.

2. Core Values:
[List the guiding principles and values of the ministry]

B- Birthing

I- Intentional

R- Reclaiming/Reproducible/Resilience

T- Training and Team Oriented

H- Honoring Heritage

3. Ministry Goals (SMART Goals – Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound):

- Short-term Goals (1-3 months) *Gathering team and training*
- Mid-term Goals (4-6 months) *Outreach/Recruiting/Evangelism*
- Mid-term Goals (6-12 months) *Spiritual training; studying/small group/meet & greeting and fellowship*
- Long-Term Goals (1-3 years) *Small groups/Support groups/Community Service Projects and Worship Opportunities*

III. Target Audience & Needs Assessment

1. Primary Audience:

- Age range: 18-35 organized by 3 groups (18-22; 23-29; 30-35)
- Spiritual maturity level: *new believers and growing believers*
- Key demographic characteristics: *male and female within Wayne County*

2. Needs Assessment:

- What are the spiritual, emotional, and relational needs of young adults in your church/community?

  Spiritual- Faith

  Emotional- humble/humility

  Relational- willingness to learn from past mistakes

- What barriers prevent young adults from engaging in discipleship?

  Not dedicated, not disciplined, fear

- What existing resources or gaps exist in young adult ministry?

  Resources- seasoned believers to mentor; availability of trainers

  Gaps- leaders be more creative; to encourage questions and problem solving

IV. Ministry Model Framework (I DO / WE DO / YOU DO Approach)

1. I DO (Leader-Led Training & Discipleship)

- **Leadership Role:** Pastor, ministry leader, or mentor leads sessions
- **Key Components:** ***Discipleship Training/Mentor Training***
  - Bible teaching
  - Spiritual disciplines (prayer, fasting, worship, Scripture study)

- Leadership development
- Theological foundations

2. WE DO (Mentorship & Small Group Formation)

- **Discipleship through Community:**
  - Small groups
  - Peer mentoring
  - Accountability partnerships
- **Engagement Activities:**
  - Service projects- *feeding, produce packing; ongoing service project- food distribution and relief supplies*
  - Retreats and spiritual renewal events
  - Group Bible studies

3. YOU DO (Empowered Leadership & Multiplication)

- **Application & Implementation:**
  - Encourage participants to take leadership roles in small groups and ministries
  - Provide opportunities for young adults to lead Bible studies, serve in church, and mentor others
  - Foster multiplication by equipping young adults to disciple others

V. Ministry Action Plan

Key Ministry Components and Strategies

Component	**Strategy**	**Responsible Leader**	**Timeline**
Bible Study & Teaching	*To develop principles of Christ*	*Mentor/Ministry Leader*	
Small Groups	*Choose participants of all ages/levels of understanding*	*Group Leader*	
Leadership Development	*Bible Study and Leadership training taken from "Equipping a New Generation Workbook"*	*Youth & Young Adult Pastor or Director*	
Service Opportunities	*Canvass surrounding area*	*Members*	

Spiritual Retreats	*Day Gathering- Chat and Chew*	*Members*	

1. Discipleship Pathway (Step by Step Growth Process)

Participants needed more time to grapple with this section for planning purposes.

PHASE	DESCRIPTION	DURATION	MILESTONE
CONNECT			
GROW			
SERVE			
MULTIPLY			

VI. Leadership Structure and Roles

1. **Leadership Team *Suggestions*** *(Names omitted for anonymity purposes)*
    - **Ministry Director- Researcher**
    - **Discipleship Coordinator- Leader**
    - **Small Group Leaders- 2 Leaders Listed (1 present for training, 1 not present for training)**
    - **Mentorship Coaches- Leader (not present for training)**
    - **Worship/Prayer Coordinator-Leader (not present for training)**

The next phase will take the project from training/building to training/implementing.

0. **Volunteer Recruitment and Training**

How volunteers will be recruited and trained	*Canvassing alpha arms housing complex and trailer residents; community fair and evangelism*

Required training and preparation	*To be offered and shared*
Ongoing support and development	*Reaching goals and moving forward with branding*

VII. Metrics for Success & Evaluation

1. Key Performance Indicators (KPIs):

- Number of young adults engaged in discipleship groups- *initial 20*
- Number of small groups and mentors developed- *3 groups with 6 mentors*
- Percentage of young adults actively serving in ministry- base 50%; goal 80%
- Spiritual growth indicators (testimonies, leadership development)- *various sessions*

2. Evaluation & Feedback Process:

- Quarterly surveys- *pre/post surveys, group assessment of activities*
- One-on-one check-ins with participants- *weekly*
- Leadership team review meetings- *monthly*

VIII. Sustainability & Next Steps

1. Long-Term Sustainability Plan:

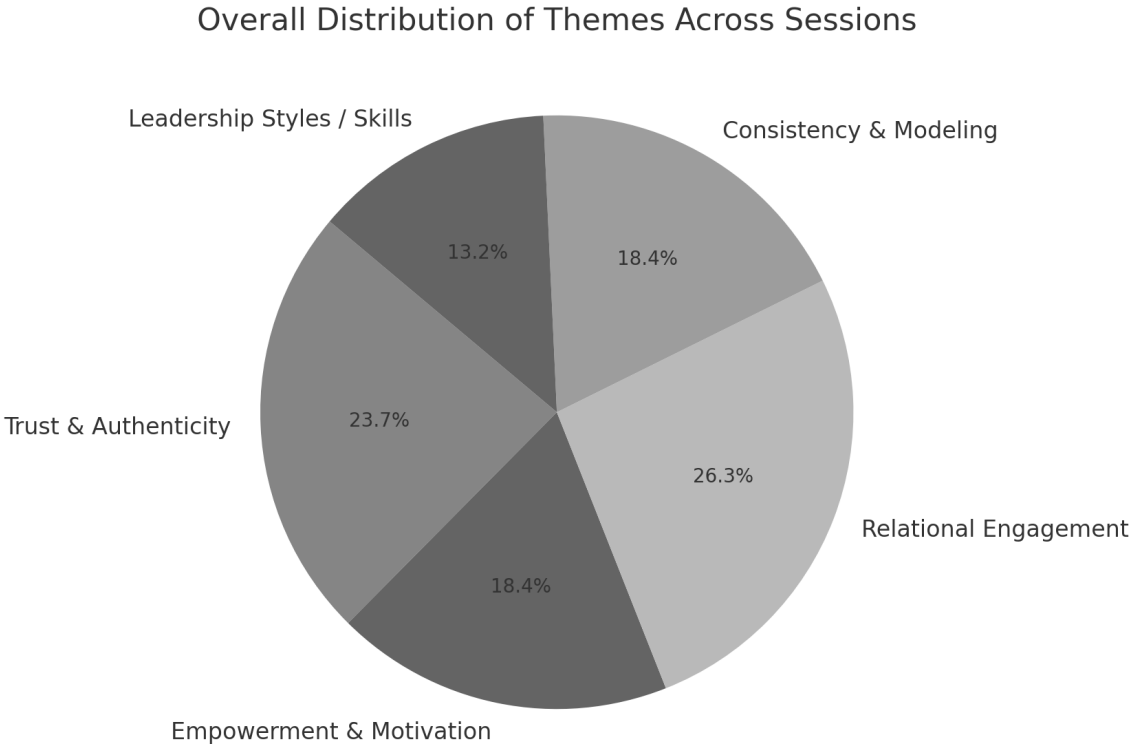
How will the ministry be sustained financially?	*PART OF CHURCH ANNUAL BUDGET; FUNDRAISING CAN BE DONE*
How will leadership transition be handled?	*MINISTRY LEADERSHIP- APPROVED AND TRAINED BY PASTOR* *CHAIRMAN/VICE-CHAIRMAN- ASSUMES LEADERSHIP ROLE WITH PASTOR APPROVAL*
What future expansions are planned?	*SCHOOL COLLABORATIONS* *YA SERVICES*

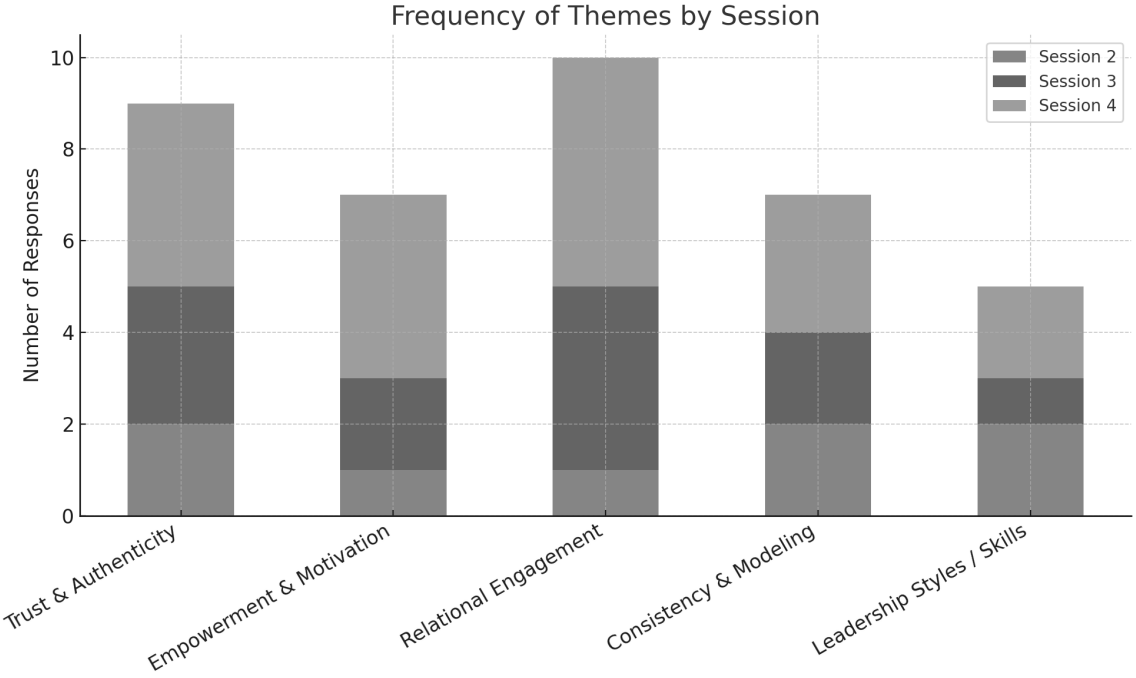
2. Next Steps:

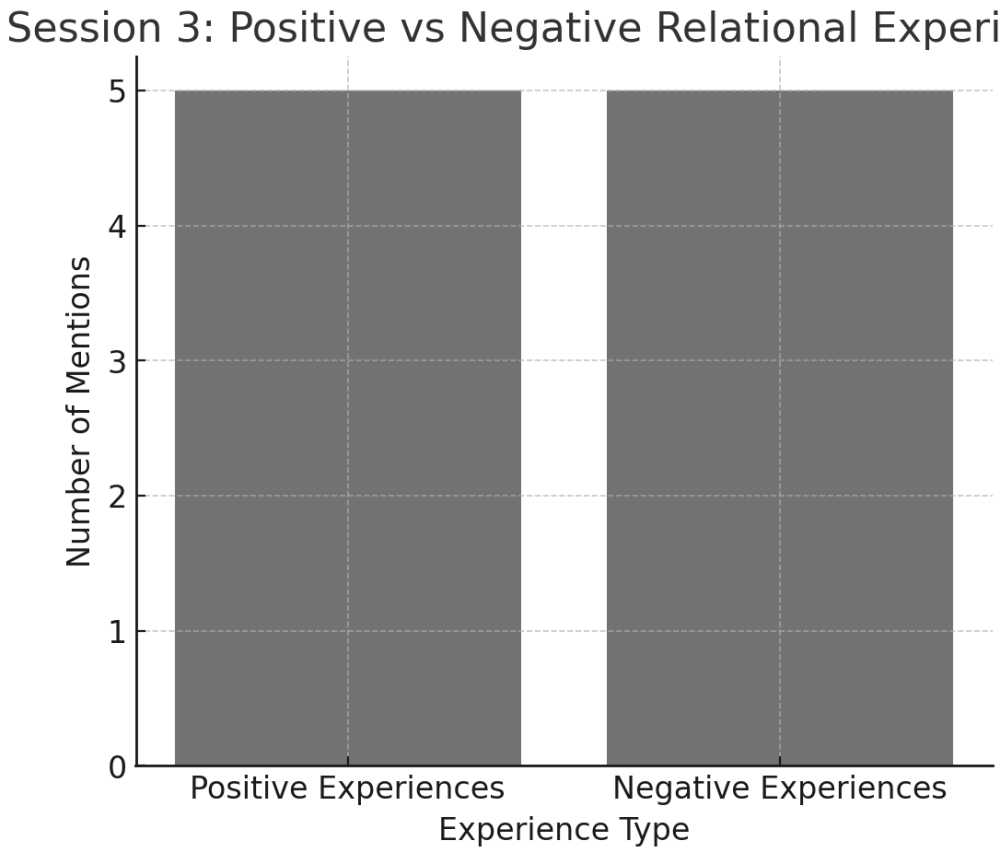
Short-Term: List immediate actions	*GATHERING TEAM- OCTOBER TO DECEMBER* *OUTREACH- JANUARY*
Mid-Term: Plans for the next 6-12 months	*SMALL GROUPS* *COMMUNITY SERVICE PROJECTS*
Long-Term: Plans for the next 1-3 years	*WORSHIP OPPORTUNITIES*

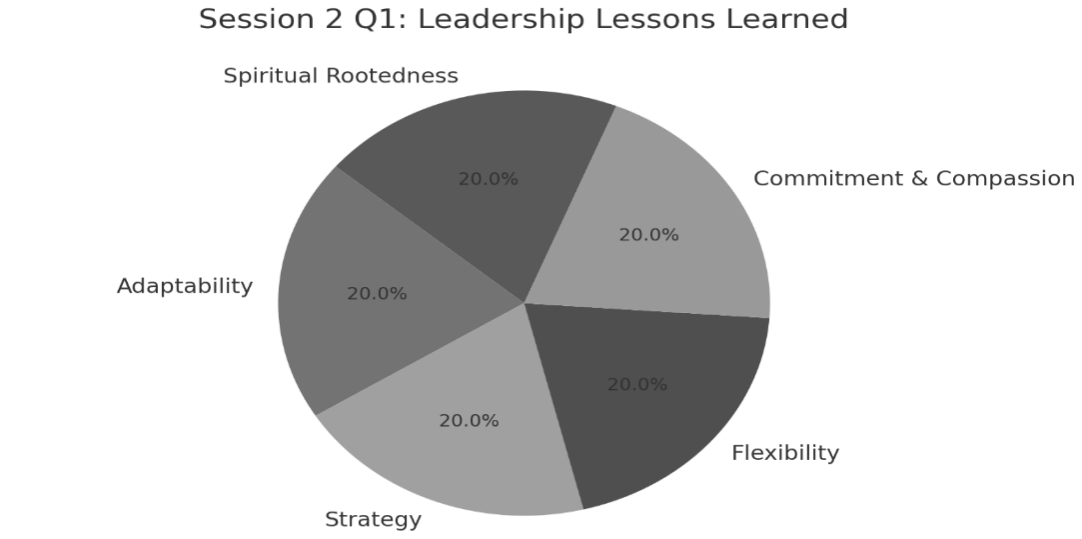
APPENDIX B

CHARTS AND GRAPHS OF NARRATIVE RESPONSES

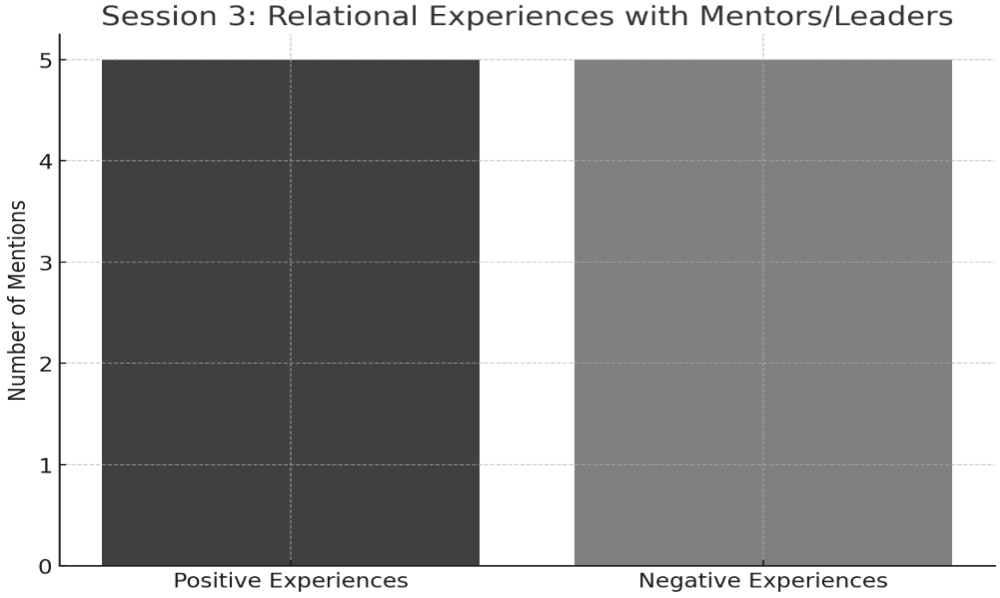

Overall Distribution of Themes Across Sessions
Leadership Styles / Skills
Consistency & Modeling
13.2%
18.4%
Trust & Authenticity
23.7%
26.3%
Relational Engagement
18.4%
Empowerment & Motivation


Frequency of Themes by Session
Session 2
Session 3
Session 4
Number of Responses
0
2
4
6
8
10
Trust & Authenticity
Empowerment & Motivation
Relational Engagement
Consistency & Modeling
Leadership Styles / Skills


Session 3: Positive vs Negative Relational Experiences
Number of Mentions
0
1
2
3
4
5
Positive Experiences
Negative Experiences
Experience Type


Session 2 Q1: Leadership Lessons Learned
Spiritual Rootedness
Commitment & Compassion
Adaptability
Flexibility
Strategy
20.0%
20.0%
20.0%
20.0%
20.0%

Session 2 Q2: Elements of Training for Spiritual Foundation
Intentional Training
Role Modeling
Spiritual Growth
Consistency
25.0%
25.0%
25.0%
25.0%


Session 3: Relational Experiences with Mentors/Leaders
Number of Mentions
0
1
2
3
4
5
Positive Experiences
Negative Experiences

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